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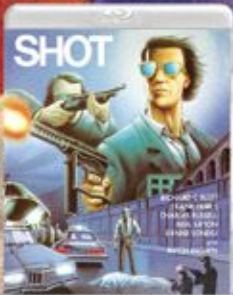
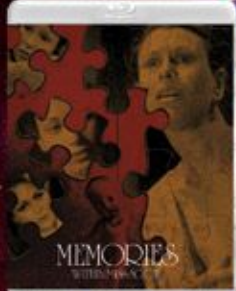
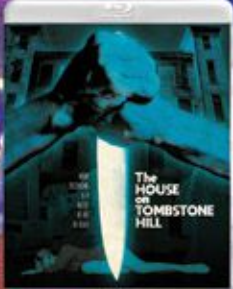
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Official Phantom Biographer

Joe Kane

Circulation/Advertising

Nancy Naglin

Contributing Writers

Dan Cziraky, Terry & Tiffany DuFoe, Ronald C. Epstein,

Tim Ferrante, Rob Freese, Joe Kane, Nancy Naglin,

Joseph Perry, John Seal, Bill Timoney, Don Vaughan,

Scott Voisin

Digital/Social Media Coordinator/Design Consultant/

Cover Design

Kevin Hein

Tech Coordinator

Tom Barnes

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TRILOGY OF TERROR

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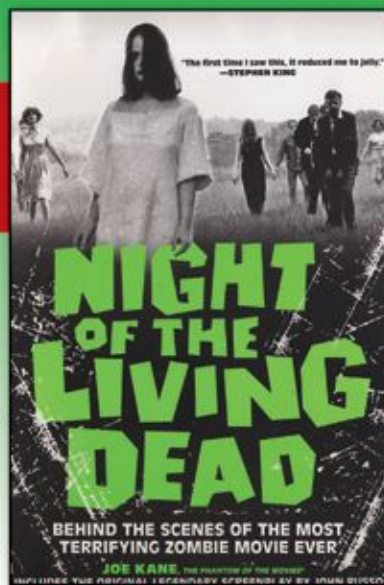
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The Phantom Speaks!

FALL FEAR-FILM FEST: To help celebrate the 2018 Fall Horror Harvest Season and mark **Night of the Living Dead's** 50th Anniversary (and follow-up **Dawn of the Dead's** 40th), John Amplas, star of George Romero's imaginative 1978 vampire classic **Martin** (likewise turning 40 this year), hooks up with *'Scope* scribe Don Vaughan for a fond look back at his long working and personal relationship with the late, great Pittsburgh-based scaremaster. In other anniversary developments, Rob Freese honors **Halloween's** 40th by paying homage to the contributions of longtime John Carpenter producer Debra Hill, who played a vital role in creating that slasher classic, while Don Vaughan honors another mega-influential fright-minded femme, **Frankenstein** author Mary Shelley, whose immortal monster turns 200 this annum. Paleontologist and screen dinosaur scholar Julia McHugh recognizes **Jurassic Park's** 25th anniversary and the Blu-ray release of the Steven Spielberg-spawned franchise's latest chapter, **Jurassic World: Fallen Kingdom**, by separating reality from myth about those mighty titans of yore. Also in a seasonal vein, Rob Freese and yours truly survey some of the latest vintage fear flicks to surface on disc, while dueling crix Tim Ferrante and Scott Voisin go the hardcore rat route to argue the merits of rodent-centric **Willards** old (1971) and new (2003).

Elsewhere in this ish, our dynamic dad/daughter duo, Terry and Tiffany DuFoe, track down the "Ma and Pa Kettle of the Movie Business," screen skin and swamp specialists Ferd and Beverly Sebastian, who recount their adventures lensing drive-in indies like **Gator Bait**, with Playmate Claudia Jennings, **The Hitchhikers**, **Rocktober Blood** and many more. Also herein, Dan Cziraky critiques Shout! Factory's newest **Mystery Science Theater 3000** set, Nancy Naglin reels back to the late '60s, when playing dirty was the celluloid order of the day, and our assorted columnists and crix check in with their latest filmic findings in the worlds of westerns, noirs, art-house, horror and more.

OBIT ORBIT: The acting ranks again felt the scourge of the Reaper's furiously swinging scythe since last we convened. Among those lost were longtime icons Burt Reynolds, 82—whose lengthy career encompassed TV series, westerns, good ol' boy capers, edgy thrillers like **Sharky's Machine** (which he also expertly directed) and comeback character roles in films like Paul Thomas Anderson's **Boogie Nights**—and former '50s "Sigh Guy"—turned-legit actor Tab Hunter, 86, a



versatile performer equally at home playing heartthrobs, heroes, heavies, and John Waters weirdos. Other actors who departed include Jeff (**Born Losers**) Cooper, 78, Robert (**Forbidden Planet**) Dix, 83, Barbara (**Family Plot**) Harris, 83, W.C. Fields costar (**Never Give a Sucker an Even Break**) Gloria Jean, 92, Deanna (**Land of the Giants**) Lund, 81, Dewey (**The Thing**, **Desperate Hours**) Martin, 94, Hammer starlet Jacqueline (**The Reptile**) Pearce, 74, Roger (**Count Yorga**) Perry, 85, and William (**Five**) Phipps, 96, among far too many others. We also bid farewell to comic artist Steve Ditko, 90, author/provocateur Harlan (**A Boy and His Dog**) Ellison, 84, premier soul songstress Aretha Franklin, 76, artist/indie genre auteur Frederic (**Godmonster of Indian Flats**) Hobbs, 82, **MAD** magazine editor Nick Meglin, 82, and cinematographer Robby (**Dead Man**) Muller, 78. Fortunately for the rest of us, their work can still be readily accessed and enjoyed, keeping their legacies alive and thriving.

THINK INK: In the print arena, we recommend Michael Gingold's outsized hardcover tome **Ad Nauseam: Newsprint Nightmares from the 1980s** (1984 Publishing, \$34.95), a compendium of genre-movie newspaper ads, ranging from **Blood Hook** to **Zombie Island Massacre**, that's sure to evoke shudders of fear and waves of nostalgia in grindhouse survivors and card-carrying members of the vidstore generation. Fans of old-school-style underground comix will want to 'scope out critic/artist Matt Bradshaw's **Cult Movie Comics: A B-Movie Horror Memoir #1**, an ongoing illustrated ode to growing up genre-crazed in those selfsame '80s. In other '80s-set intrigues, Neo-Noir



meets New Wave in Rex Weiner's **The (Original) Adventures of Ford Fairlane** (Rare Bird Books). Traveling a bit further back, the latest issue (#41) of publisher Dick Klemensen's handsome Hammer-centric magazine **Little Shoppe of Horrors** (littleshoppeofhorrors.com) focuses on the prehistoric adventure epic **When Dinosaurs Ruled the Earth** and features Part 2 of a comprehensive history of the influential '60s zine **Castle of Frankenstein**. And covering decades of media and cultural history is veteran film and TV insider John Huff's intimate memoir **Truth and Poverty: A Lifetime of Temporary Disillusionment** (CultMachine).

PHLATSCREEN PHLASHES: During the typically busy run-up to press time, we paused to revisit several long-unseen faves, including a pair of fresh Blu-rays from Olive Films, The Wachowski Brothers' clever 1996 neo-noir **Bound** (still arguably their best effort) and Robert Wise's stark, devastating 1959 caper **Odds Against Tomorrow**, with Harry Belafonte and Robert Ryan, along with two venerable Val Lewton chillers, **Bedlam** and **The Leopard Man**, both of which seem to grow deeper with each viewing. We also caught up with a duo of more recent outings we'd initially missed, Fede Alvarez' intense chiller **Don't Breathe**, with Stephen Lang, and Michael Apted's action-packed spy thriller **Unlocked**, as well as tracking down online an elusive title we'd long wanted to see, Servando Gonzalez' danger-fraught 1965 coming-of-age tale **The Fool Killer** (aka **Violent Journey**), featuring Anthony Perkins as sort of a Civil War-era Norman Bates.

BIJOU BULLETINS: After 31 years, the iconic NYC screening rooms Magno Review 1 and 2 follow their even older counterpart the Broadway Screening Room (closed in 2013) in biting the celluloid dust. Your Phantom recalls catching countless screenings therein, including a memorable 2000 double bill of **Shadow of the Vampire** and John Waters' **Cecil B. Demented**. In cheerier developments, Manhattan's Museum of Modern Art earns kudos for hosting two gala genre fests, one devoted to Vincent Price (**Modern Matinees: Vincent Price**), the other to Hammer Films (**Hammer Horror: A Frankenstein Septet**), part of MoMA's **It's Alive! Frankenstein** at 200 salute. Both series are targeted for October, while the Mary Shelley tribute can be visited through 2018. In the meantime, till next time, don't forget to...

Keep watching the screens!



Phantom Pheedback



DEAD-ON FRED

Dear Phantom,

Like many latter-day baby boomers I grew up watching Fred MacMurray as Steven Douglas on **My Three Sons**. Many years later I was shocked (but in a good way) when I saw the actor I primarily knew as a bland, benign sitcom dad playing Walter Neff, an insurance salesman corrupted by his unbridled lust for blonde vixen Phyllis Dietrichson (Barbara Stanwyck) in Billy Wilder's film noir classic **Double Indemnity**. Eventually I caught MacMurray in another noir flick, this time as good cop gone bad Paul Sheridan in **Pushover** (VS #107), and once again his downfall is due to a blonde enchantress, this time Kim Novak as Lona McLane. In between these two gritty noir pictures he was equally effective in light comedy fare like **The Egg and I** and in the early 1960s was popular among younger viewers in Disney's **Absent Minded Professor** and its sequel **Son of Flubber**. Throw **The Caine Mutiny** into the mix and I had to admit that Fred MacMurray was a much more versatile actor than I had given him credit for.

Double Indemnity is clearly the best of the two noir films at hand, but **Pushover** is still a superb picture and featured the stunning debut of the alluring (to say the least) Kim Novak. Novak's Lona is the more appealing of the two femme fatales, and in more than one way. Phyllis Dietrichson, although beautiful, is an evil manipulator who has no qualms about planning a murder. Lona is certainly not innocent and when cornered is more than willing to double-cross her bank-robbing boyfriend, yet she seems to have a softer core and appears to have genuinely fallen in love with Sheridan. Sheridan, meanwhile, still blinded by lust and greed and in too deep to turn back, steps closer and closer to the edge until tumbling head over heels into the abyss. In the end Lona remains touchingly loyal to Paul, emerging from the shadows to be at his side. And does Sheridan die? That point is left ambiguous. As **Pushover** draws to its conclusion, the cascade of obstacles Sheridan encounters seems overkill at times, but then a bad cop doesn't get the good breaks in the gritty world of noir. The Phantom nails it with his review of "a textbook noir that leaves few, if any, tropes unturned."

Pushover and Hitchcock's **Rear Window** were released within a month of each other in 1954, and both feature the theme of surveillance in an urban apartment setting. In **Pushover** the cops watch things from "across the way," which is exactly what Jimmy Stewart does in **Rear Window**, although one



starts out as a police-sanctioned stakeout, the other as the curiosity of a private citizen. Both pictures contain elements of voyeurism and both showcase a cool blonde beauty as the principal female love interest. **Witness to Murder**, also from 1954 (and also with Barbara Stanwyck!), likely has some of the same or similar elements, but it's a film I have not yet seen.

Thanks also for the review of **Undertow**, a nifty noir from William Castle before he was the King of Gimmicks. I especially enjoy this one because its cast includes the lovely Peggy Dow, an actress probably best-remembered for her role in **Harvey** with Jimmy Stewart. She appeared in just nine pictures before retiring from the screen at a young age.

—Timothy Walters, Muskogee, OK

*Fred MacMurray proved very effective in those change-of-pace hardboiled roles with his measured delivery reset from comic to edgy. **Rear Window** and **Pushover** would make for a memorable retro double bill. Meantime, definitely scope out Roy Rowland's **Witness to Murder** (Kino Lorber, VS #94), featuring Barbara Stanwyck as the titular witness, who spies, a la **Rear Window**'s James Stewart, a suspected slaying in the building across the way, and a typically icy turn by George Sanders as a homicidal ex-Nazi. William Castle exhibited a fair aptitude for noirs—see also his **Mark of the Whistler**, **When Strangers Marry** and **Johnny Stool Pigeon**.*

KEEN ON MARTINE

To **VideoScope**,

As always wonderful issue. Reviews of movies I would otherwise not know about, I especially appreciate the Phantom's *I Wake Up Streaming*. Nancy Naglin's compare-and-contrast of the three Churchill films was so timely as I'd just watched the Brian Cox film, but her *Reeling Back* was filled with unforgettable facts—fascas as a reoccurring image of state, f.i., and the poor elephant sacrificed for **Scipio**, for another. But I must confess the first thing I glommed onto was the DuFoe interview with Martine Beswick. (I went back to see **Prehistoric Women** three times in its theatrical run.) Dan Cziraky's **MSTie Madness** because several of those movies were my sincere faves and still sort of are no matter what those puppets say. Scott Voisin's Eddie Deezen was a surprise and makes me hopefully wonder if there are more **Character King** books in our future. All in all, thanks for this catalog of cinematic delights.

—John Huff, via e-mail

*Thanks for the kind words, J.H. We plan to follow the exotic Martine with another Hammer icon and costar of William Lustig's **Maniac**, Caroline Munro. Hopefully, Scott will be unleashing a new **Character Kings** volume soon.*

DEPT. OF CORRECTIONS

Dear Phantom,

Flashing Red Light Alert!

In your review of **The Strange Mrs. Crane** on page 27 (#106), you referred to star Marjorie Lord as the "future Mrs. Chester A. Riley." But it was former '40s ingenue Marjorie Reynolds that played the part of Peg Riley—Ms. Lord was the spouse of comedian Danny Thomas on **Make Room for Daddy**! Otherwise, another fantastic, fun-filled issue, and I eagerly await the next one!

—Gary Loggins, New Bedford, MA

Right you are, G.L. All we can add is: What a revoltin' development!

Greetings Phantom,

I can't tell you how much it means to me to still be able to hold a horror/cult film magazine in my hands, brand new each and every quarter; thank you for everything you have done for the community.

—Brian Bollbach, NYC

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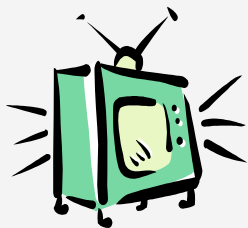
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NEW RELEASE SHELF

New release titles are followed by year, Phantom rating, director, lead actors, running time (with titles released in separate editions, the running time refers to the Unrated version), DVD and/or Blu-ray label and release date (month and year).

RATINGS KEY

⌘⌘⌘⌘
Couldn't be better

⌘⌘⌘1/2
Excellent

⌘⌘⌘
Good

⌘⌘1/2
Not bad; worth watching

⌘⌘
Mediocre, worthwhile for a particular thesp, director or genre

⌘1/2
Poor but may have points of interest

⌘
Just plain bad

1/2⌘
Even worse than that

0⌘
The pits

N/A

Not available on video

N.I.D.

Not in distribution

Special thanks go to Guidance Ro-Man for his ratings symbol suggestion.



BODY OF DECEIT (2017)⌘1/2

D: Alessandro Capone. Kristanna Loken, Antonio Cupo, Sarai Givaty, Giulio Berruti, Wesley Ellul. 72 mins. (MVD Visual) 6/18

This is not your father's "erotic thriller": here, the women also reveal their body art. L.A. author Alice (Loken) made a comfortable living fronting for a popular author before her traumatic auto accident. Now she and husband Max (Cupo) stay in their Malta estate as she struggles to meet her deadline. Max hires Sara (Givaty) to assist his wife. The charismatic housekeeper gets friendly with the ghostwriter and stuff happens. Director Capone and his production team don't passively allow the feature to "find its audience"—they gear it to the international voyeur with scenic Mediterranean locations and copulating cosmopolitans. American ex-model Loken (*Terminator 3*) may be strictly Hollywood, but her cast-

mates have foreign experience. Vancouver-born Cupo has appeared in Canadian and Italian television productions. Their Israeli colleague Givaty has her domestic credits, but readers may remember her from *CSI*. The director colorfully animates a routine script, which is okay if you just want to waste your time. People who value cinematic excellence will go elsewhere. Genre fans may wonder, "Where are Andrew Stevens and Shannon Tweed when you need them?"

—Ronald Charles Epstein

FILMWORKER (2016)⌘⌘⌘1/2

D: Tony Zierra. Leon Vitali, Ryan O'Neal, Matthew Modine, R. Lee Ermey, Danny Lloyd, Stellan Skarsgard. 93 mins. (Kino Lorber Films) 9/18

Leon Vitali was building a solid acting resume, mostly in British teleseries like *Justice* and *The Fenn Street Gang*, when he became entranced by the cinema of Stanley Kubrick, specifically *2001: A Space Odyssey* and *A Clockwork Orange*. It seemed a dream come true, then, when the handsome 26-year-old successfully auditioned for a key role in Kubrick's lavish period drama *Barry Lyndon*. Vitali's spirits further soared when the famously perfectionist filmmaker took a liking to the young actor's approach, expanding his part as the petulant Lord Bullington as filming progressed. Shockingly enough, that turning point also all but ended Vitali's onscreen career. Adopting Kubrick as his personal Svengali, Vitali devoted his life to serving the master, working as everything from casting director, acting coach, production assistant, home-video supervisor, dubbing translator, restorationist, messenger boy, go-fer and, following Kubrick's demise, unpaid curator of his cinematic estate. In return for sacrificing his vocation and increasingly neglecting his own family, Vitali received scant credit beyond Kubrick's withering abuse and occasional grudging approval. Vitali, now 71, relates his singular tale, addressing director Zierra's camera as it follows him on his current rounds and popping up in all manner of archival footage spanning his decades of eager servitude. On hand to further flesh out Vitali's unusual story are such noted colleagues as *Barry Lyndon* star Ryan O'Neal (who vowed never to work

"Extraordinary. Will have film geeks howling with joy."

—David Fear, *Rolling Stone*

"An absolute must-see documentary for fans of Stanley Kubrick."

—Chris O'Falt, *IndieWire*



FILM WORKER

STANLEY KUBRICK'S UNSUNG ASSISTANT

A FILM BY TONY ZIERRA

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with the autocratic auteur again after that experience), *Full Metal Jacket* actors Matthew Modine and R. Lee Ermey, erstwhile *The Shining* tyke Danny Lloyd, and many others, all of whom share their insights not only into Vitali's devotion but Kubrick himself, making *Filmworker* a must for Kubrick cultists and general film buffs alike. As for the gaunt, haunted-looking but apparently happy Vitali, he plans to spend the rest of his days in continued service to his once and future idol. Extras on Kino's DVD include a bonus Q&A with Vitali and Zierra, along with the theatrical trailer. Alpha Video, meanwhile, recently released Vitali's final significant role, as Victor Frankenstein in Calvin Floyd's generally well-regarded 1977 Mary Shelley adaptation *Terror of Frankenstein*.

—The Phantom

VideoScope 7

FLORA (2017) 88

D: Sasha Louis Vukovic. Teresa Marie Doran, Dan Lin, Sari Mercer, Miles G. Jackson, Caleb Noel, William Aaron. 105 mins. (Mill Creek Entertainment) 8/18

A solid premise, brilliant cinematography (by Eric Irvin), and excellent soundtrack score (by Nathan Prilliman) are fatally undermined by a flat, redundant script (by debuting director Vukovic) enacted by what looks like a cast of weekend cosplayers. Our story sees a team of young Ivy League botanists chart unexplored territory in 1929 to study the local flora. In the midst of their mission, they unearth a mysterious, unseen deadly organism that sets them on a desperate path for survival. Unfortunately, this potentially intriguing addition to Flora and Fauna Film-dome, which encompasses everything from the inventive Quatermass-like sci-fi invasion tale **Day of the Triffids** to the notoriously risible killer tree romp **From Hell It Came** (VS #106), grinds on far too long, with our amateur thespians, clad in overly researched period garb and enthralled by awful approximations of '20s tunes emanating from their tinny victrola, endlessly speculating re the nature of the threat and the best way to escape it. As noted at the top, tech credits are above average, so maybe the filmmaking crew can take another crack at it with a professional cast and better scenario. Extras include a behind-the-scenes featurette, cast and crew commentary, deleted scenes, and trailer.

FREE AND EASY (2017) 888

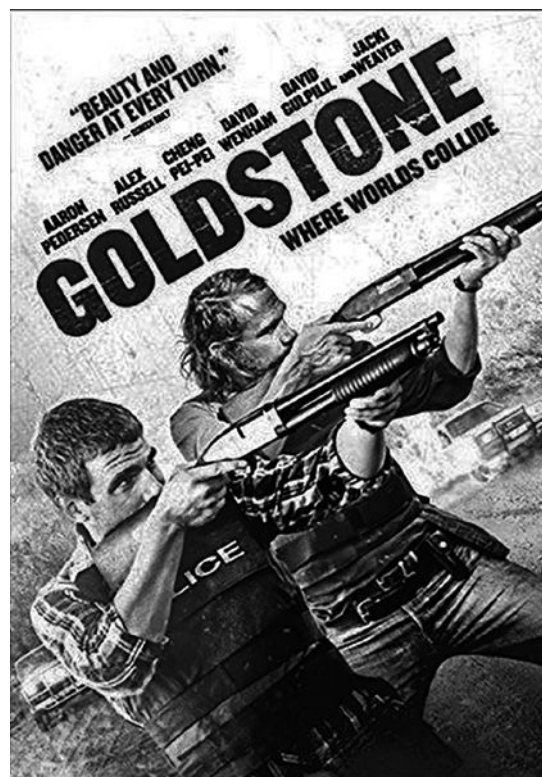
D: Geng Jun. Xu Gang, Zhang Zhiyong, Xue Baohe, Zhang Xun, Gu Benbin, Wang XuXu. 99 mins, (Film Rise/MVD Visual) 7/18

Geng Jun's **Free and Easy** reps China's contribution to the Loco Locale subgenre, films, like the Coen Brothers' **Fargo** (VS #49), Oliver Stone's **U-Turn** (VS #26), David Lynch's **Twin Peaks** (VS #1), Jim Jarmusch's **Dead Man** (VS #20) and Takashi Miike's **Gozu** (VS #54), that put the city in eccentricity. Of the above, **Free and Easy** shares its closest ties with **Gozu**. As in Miike's shaggy Yakuza story, **Free and Easy** opens with a stranger (Xu Gang), a traveling soap salesman, entering a remote, apparently all but abandoned industrial town. His is no ordinary soap, though—a deep whiff renders unwary sniffers unconscious, allowing our peddler plenty of time to relieve them of their goods. Soon, we encounter the city's oddballs—a hustler disguised as a monk, a pair of clueless cops, a troubled couple who run a ramshackle boardinghouse, an obsessive forest ranger on the trail of a suspected tree thief, et al. Director Jun Geng moves his idiosyncratic pieces at a leisurely pace, filling his film with cryptic deadpan interactions rich in offbeat wit and irony as his characters wander resolutely through this obscure Northern China circle of Hell. The action intensifies a mite when a murder occurs, but smooth resolution remains elusive. **Free and Easy** boasts the sonic talents of one of China's most popular rock bands, Second Hand Rose, who conclude with an extended Chinese rap outro.

GOLDSTONE (2016) 8881/2

D: Ivan Sen. Aaron Pedersen, Alex Russell, Cheng Pei-Pei, David Wenham, David Gulpilil, Jacki Weaver, Michelle Lim Davidson. 110 mins. (Lightyear Entertainment/MVD Visual) 9/18

An excellent Australian entry in the modern wasteland western subgenre (see also Taylor Sheridan's **Hell or High Water** [VS #101] and **Wind River** [VS #106]), one-man wonder Ivan Sen, who scripted, directed, photographed, edited and composed the score, **Goldstone** brilliantly weaves all the major threads of a traditional frontier tale into a tense contemporary tapestry. Pedersen embodies weary cool as Jay Swann, a mixed-blood detective who makes an inauspicious arrival in the titular Outback town (more of a trailer-based settlement really) when he's busted for drunk driving by decent but compromised cop Josh Waters (Russell). Jay, who harbors his own tragic backstory, is on a missing persons case that threatens to interfere with corrupt locals looking to acquire aboriginal lands, by any means necessary, to ensure a lucrative construction deal. In the course of his investigation, Jay runs afoul of deceptively cheery matronly mastermind The Mayor (Weaver, of **Animal Kingdom** fame), crooked contractor Johnny (Wenham), a gang of heavily armed thugs on board to enforce "progress," along with a human traf-



ficking prostitution ring run by Mrs. Lao (Cheng Pei-Pei), distressed captive May (Davidson), and endangered indigenous holdout Jimmy (a rather grizzled Gulpilil, looking a long way from his youthful **Walkabout** days) who helps Jay reconnect with his native roots. Sen successfully maneuvers his assorted pieces in a steadily steam-gaining thriller on an inevitable path to a violent showdown. Oz star Pedersen, who previously teamed with Sen for the 2013 Outback-set **Mystery Road**, handily sells his troubled, laconic lawman, while his fellow thespians lend solid support. Extras on Lightyear/MVD's Blu-ray edition include the featurettes **The Corruption of Goldstone**, **Detective Jay Swann**, and **The Indigenous People of Australia**, along with profiles of actors Russell and Weaver and filmmaker Sen. **Goldstone** received a limited Stateside theatrical release in May '18 and is well worth seeking out on Blu-ray.

—The Phantom

BEST OF THE OUTBACK WEST

The Chant of Jimmy Blacksmith (1978)

D: Fred Schepisi (Industrial)

Mad Dog Morgan (1976)

D: Philippe Mora (Troma)

Ned Kelly (1970)

D: Tony Richardson (MGM)

The Proposition (2005)

D: John Hillcoat (First Look)

The Tracker (2002)

D: Rolf de Heer (New Line)

Utu (1988)

D: Geoff Murphy (Kino Lorber)



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NEXT TIME I'LL AIM FOR THE HEART (2014) 8/12

D: Cedric Anger. Guillaume Canet, Ana Girardot, Jean-Yves Bételoot, Patrick Azam, Arnaud Henriot, Douglas Attal. 111 mins. (Icarus Films) 8/18

Based on a true story liberally reimagined by auteur Anger, **Next Time I'll Aim for the Heart** recounts the rather robotic sociopathic exploits of Franck Neuhaert, gendarme by day, random serial killer by night, who plagued France in 1978-79 (to underscore the time frame, the soundtrack includes contemporaneous tracks by American rockers Johnny Thunders and the Velvet Underground). Stationed in a small French city, Franck suffers from acute Bickleititis: like Martin Scorsese's **Taxi Driver** antihero Travis Bickle (Robert De Niro) Franck leads a distanced existence, with little apparent affection for or ties with his fellow law officers, neighbors, or even Sophie (Girardot), his sort-of squeeze whom he sets up for an ultimate humiliation. Nor is Franck a particularly inventive psycho, contenting himself with giving rides to unwary femmes, then dispatching them with bullets and dumping their bodies in the woods. While **Next Time** is uniformly well acted, especially by lead Canet, its disaffected tone and languid pace exert a similarly distancing effect on viewers. Nearly identical material received more involving treatment in Jaime Rosales' 2003 Spanish thriller **The Hours of the Day** (VS

#50), featuring a strong central performance by Alex Brendemühl as an alienated clothes store worker who likewise surrenders to murderous impulses. One interesting side note is the apparently extreme hostility festering between France's gendarmes and regular police, at least as depicted here, with the two organizations seemingly loathe to cooperate with each other. **Next Time** is worth a look for serial killer completists but doesn't represent one of that long-thriving subgenre's more compelling achievements.

—*The Phantom*

NIGHT ZERO (2017) 8/8

D: Mark Cantu. Katie Maloney, Eric Swader, Dawnelle Jewell, Vincent Bombara, Umar Faraz. 81 mins. (MVD Visual) 5/18

In 1967, western Pennsylvania contributed to indie/horror history when cult director George A. Romero shot **Night of the Living Dead** there. Fifty years later, writer/director Cantu turns Waynesburg, a picturesque small town near Pittsburgh, into the setting of a tale that meshes Romero's dark visions with the sensibility of

thirtysomething. In this story, founding couple Nina (Maloney) and C.J. (Swader) bring their negative energy to their friends' dinner party. The celebration is interrupted by an extraterrestrial invasion and a zombified population, an emergency that puts the "kill" in "buzzkill." The script works because it shows people coping with ordinary problems being forced to confront nightmares that haunt genre-film characters. Maloney and Swader effectively ground the sci-fi/horror scenario by teaming up to reproduce the all-too-familiar dynamics of the dysfunctional relationship. Waynesburg's suburban locations further enhance credibility. Actors and settings interact in a manner that enables the viewer to understand Cantu's doomed portrait of postmodern America.

—Ronald Charles Epstein

A QUIET PLACE (2018) 8/8 1/2

D: John Krasinski. Emily Blunt, John Krasinski, Millicent Simmonds, Noah Jupe, Cade Woodward, Leon Russom. 90 mins. (Universal Studios) 7/18

Sort of a **Night of the Living Sssh**, director/co-scripter/costar Krasinski's ingenious chiller pits a post-apoc family unit against vicious blind aliens that negotiate via their acute hearing: Make the slightest sound and you die. Krasinski and his excellent ensem-

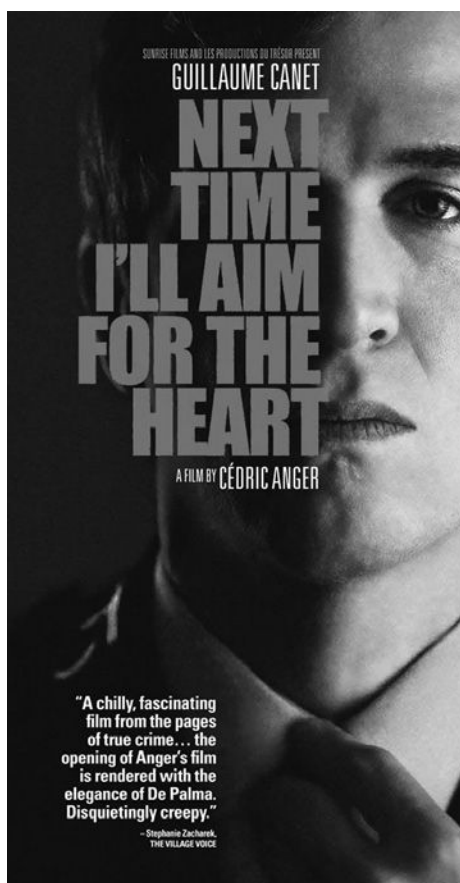
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A QUIET PLACE

"THE SCARIEST AND MOST INNOVATIVE MOVIE OF THE YEAR"

MATT MILLER, ESQUIRE



ble cast transform what seems like a bite-size anthology episode premise into a nerve-shredding feature-length experience as Lee Abbott (Krasinski), wife Evelyn (Blunt) and their three children hide in a large farmhouse (shades of **Night of the Living Dead**!) seeking to elude the visually challenged but sonically sharp predators. Classic sequences abound, highlighted by an excruciating passage that finds an injured Evelyn attempt to give silent birth while a visible monster salivates nearby. While **A Quiet Place** also contains echoes of **War of the Worlds** and the **Alien** franchise (with a likely unintended last-reel nod to **Invisible Invaders**), the film arrives as a refreshingly original piece. Especially impressive is young Simmonds as the Abbotts' deaf daughter Regan, whose condition at once prepared them to survive in this terrifying new world and inadvertently causes the early death of a sibling. Like Jordan Peele's brilliant **Get Out** (VS #103), the modestly budgeted pic proved a surprise smash hit at the box office, standing out as a bracing exception to the usual run-of-the-plex Hollywood pap. Extras on Universal's double-disc Blu-ray/DVD/Digital edition include **Creating the Quiet**, a Krasinski-hosted behind-the-scenes look at the film's production; **The Sound of Darkness**, dealing with the sound design; and **A Reason for Silence**, about the visual effects. 8

—*The Phantom*

HEARD BUT NOT SEEN ADVENTURES IN VOICE-ACTING!

By Bill Timoney

While actor Bill Timoney has appeared on-screen in many films (**The Infiltrator**) and TV series (**12 Monkeys**), he found his true calling providing voices for others in a wide variety of screen fare. In his debut **VS** column, Bill recalls his earliest inspirations.

James Bond helped me find my voice.

It was 1972. Mom had driven me and the guys to the Century Theater on Route 17 in Paramus, NJ, to spend a Saturday afternoon watching a double feature of **You Only Live Twice** and **Thunderball**. Back then, United Artists would fill the gap between the release years of a new James Bond movie by reissuing previous Bond films on double bills. This would be my first exposure to the wildly successful series.

Twice came on first. We thrilled to 007's adventures, from the eye-popping outer space opening to the climactic battle inside Blofeld's secret volcanic fake lake HQ. But right in the middle of that climax, I noticed that one of Blofeld's henchmen looked familiar. It was Cato from the Inspector Clouseau film **A Shot in the Dark**. I didn't know that the actor's name was Burt Kwouk; I just knew that I had seen him in that Peter Sellers comedy on the *NBC Saturday Night at the Movies* only a few weeks earlier. But while he may have looked familiar, he certainly didn't *sound* familiar.

I returned home from that Bondfest a changed cinemaniac. I forced my kid brother Bob to sit still while I acted out both films beat by beat (forever ruining them for him). When I reached the part where Blofeld's henchman spoke during the missile launch countdown, I made sure to tell Bob "*but it's not his voice!*"

James Bond became my obsession, with Sean Connery dethroning Peter Cushing as my preferred screen idol. Acting out those flicks for my kid brother was an early step on my path toward the acting profession, which I entered in 1978. But Cato's vocal discrepancy drove me to learn more about how his voice had been altered. Once I got into the voice-acting business, I learned about ADR, aka "Automated Dialogue Recording," a process directors use in post-production to add voices to their films—and sometimes to replace those of the on-camera actors.

I've worked regularly as a voice actor in films, TV shows and cartoons since 1991. I've done dubbing (putting English over a

foreign language program), ADR group "looping" (creating conversations for actors seen on-screen in the background), and re-voicing (replacing a principal actor's voice). Voice actors are rarely listed in the credits, so when on-screen actors have their voices replaced, they don't know whose voice is coming out of their mouths. Sometimes, it's me.

An indie filmmaker recently hired me to voice a low-budget feature he'd filmed in Montana. He shot his scenes in some beautiful exteriors. But those locations were windy, making it impossible to record "clean" audio. When he got his footage into post, the filmmaker found he needed to re-record an actor whose audio had been wind-blown. The actor lives in Montana. The filmmaker was spending his last dimes on his post-production—in NYC. Unable to afford transportation, the filmmaker chose the cheaper option of hiring me to replace his voice.

Whenever I'm hired to re-voice an on-camera actor, I think about Burt Kwouk in that Bond film. Even in 1972, I thought Kwouk's replacement voice didn't come close to matching him. And I wasn't alone in that opinion. When I did voice work on the film **Trumbo**, I mentioned that "Kwouk moment" to director Jay Roach. Roach made his directorial debut on **Austin Powers: International Man of Mystery**, which perfectly parodied the James Bond films **On Her Majesty's Secret Service** and **You Only Live Twice**. Roach confirmed for me that Mike Myers and he had intentionally cast a slim, youthful actor as the Dr. Evil henchman providing the countdown, then dubbed him with a very deep and old-sounding voice that didn't come close to matching him. The bit was their "homage" to Burt Kwouk's re-voicing.

Kwouk was hardly alone in his Bond fate. Consider German actor Gert Frobe, who played the iconic title role in **Goldfinger**. Frobe's voice is not heard in the film! His entire vocal performance—including that immortal line "No, Mr. Bond, I expect you to *die!*"—is provided by unbilled British TV actor Michael Collins. The skeptical can view an installment of the Roger Moore TV series **The Saint** featuring Collins in an on-camera role (Episode 6.8 **The Hi-Jackers**, which includes familiar Bond-film faces Walter Gotell and Shane Rimmer among the cast).

Then there's Robert Rietti, who looped scores of films in the 1960s and '70s. For the Bond franchise, Rietti re-voiced (among others) **Thunderball** villain Largo (Adolfo Celi), **You Only Live Twice**'s Tiger Tanaka (Tetsuro Tanba), and the unnamed Blofeld in the pre-credit sequence of **For Your Eyes Only** (played on-camera by John Hollis, Lando Calrissian's bald aide in **The Empire Strikes Back**).



Burt Kwouk left speechless in **You Only Live Twice**.

Bond producer Albert "Cubby" Broccoli prioritized "looks" when he cast his Bond girls. He famously rejected Julie Christie for the "Domino" role in **Thunderball** based solely on her "cup size." So Christie made the film **Darling** instead, earning the "Best Actress" Academy Award for her performance!

Casting models and beauty pageant contestants with little thespian training didn't faze Broccoli, for he could always "fix it in post." His chief fixers were Nikki van der Zyl and Barbara Jefford. Van der Zyl's voice is as much a part of the early James Bond cinema as John Barry's signature music and Ken Adam's striking sets. She provided the voices for both Ursula Andress and Eunice Gayson in **Dr. No** and re-voiced Gayson's "Sylvia Trench" character in **From Russia with Love**. Van der Zyl is Shirley Eaton's voice in **Goldfinger**, Claudine Auger's in **Thunderball**, Mie Hama's in **You Only Live Twice**, and Corinne Clery's in **Moonraker**, among others.

While Van der Zyl is a pro voice artist, Barbara Jefford is a respected actresses of the British stage. Broccoli hired her to re-voice the complex role of "Tatiana Romanov" in **From Russia with Love**. Because Jefford added depth and nuance to model Daniella Bianchi's turn, Broccoli had her re-voice Molly Peters in **Thunderball** and Caroline Munro in **The Spy Who Loved Me**.

Re-voicing may be a fairly common practice in movies, but the James Bond franchise made it an art form. So if Burt Kwouk felt slighted that his own voice was replaced in **You Only Live Twice**, he was in good company. ☘

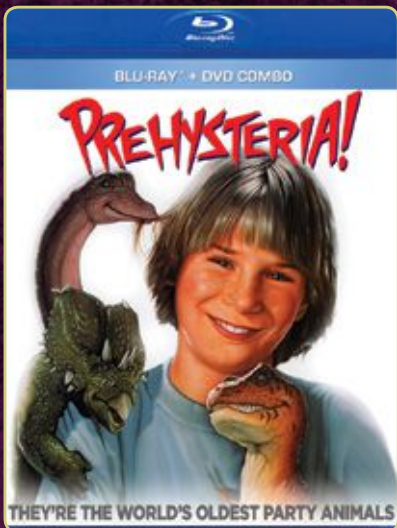
Next time: what it's like working as a voice actor for one of the true geniuses of the craft—
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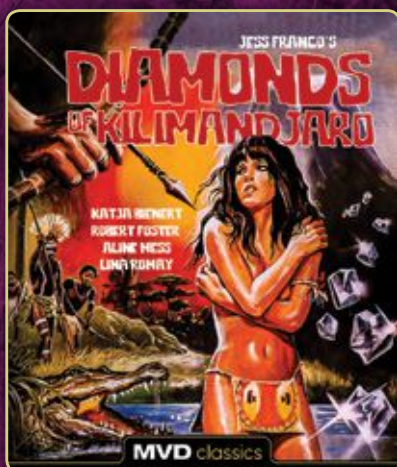
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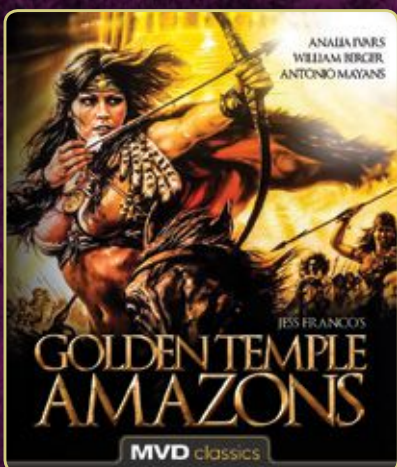
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REELING BACK PLAYING DIRTY!

By Nancy Naglin

PLAY DIRTY (1969) ♂♂♂♂

D: Andre De Toth. Michael Caine, Nigel Davenport, Nigel Green, Harry Andrews, Vivian Pickles. 118 mins. (MGM Video)

THE GREAT SILENCE (1968) ♂♂♂♂

D: Sergio Corbucci. Jean-Louis Trintignant, Klaus Kinski, Vionetta McGee, Frank Wolff, Luigi Pistilli. 105 mins. (Film Movement Classics) 6/18

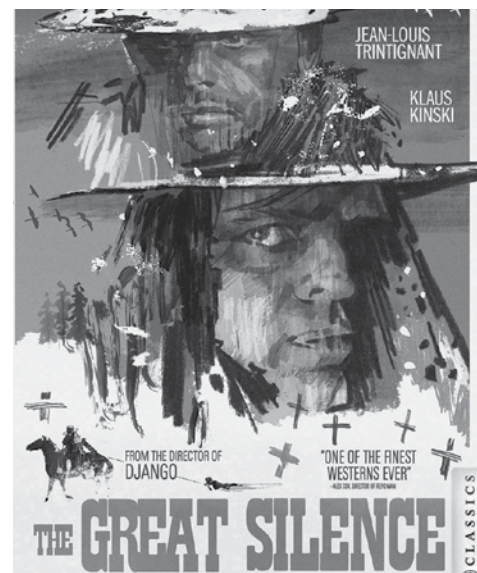
In the late '60s, Italian spaghetti western innovator, director Sergio Corbucci, influenced by the deaths of Che Guevara and Malcolm X, set out to show, in the most unvarnished manner imaginable, the resiliency of totalitarian regimes in the incomparable, belatedly acclaimed **The Great Silence**. The Vietnam War was raging, inspiring the betrayal and treachery of a futility of war caper gone wrong in Andre (**House of Wax**) De Toth's magnificent **Play Dirty**, and, with other soaring, downbeat films echoing the same message—**Cool Hand Luke** (1967), **Easy Rider** (1969) and notably **Night of the Living Dead** (1968)—the era's too-good-to-die, sacrificial, doomed antihero emerged in a kind of searing, soul-crushing cinema so gut-wrenching that these films teach you everything you need to know for every hopeless era.

Few films can match the panache, bite and political resonance of the tightly constructed and endlessly devious **Play Dirty**. In World War II, the Brits are bogged down in North Africa, where special ops mastermind Brig. Blore (Andrews), subordinate to self-serving Col. Masters (Green), has recruited a team of criminals (**The Dirty Dozen** was released two years earlier) to sneak behind enemy lines to blow up fuel tanks. Problem is, under Capt. Cyril Leech's (Davenport) command, they not only fail repeatedly but emerge from the desert with their regular commander conveniently and mysteriously dead. Unsuspecting Capt. Douglas (Caine), a non-combatant Royal Engineer petroleum expert, is plucked, protesting, out of the humdrum to be the next desert casualty. From the get-go the perpetually undermining, amoral Leech (originally imprisoned for having sunk his tramp steamer for insurance money) intends to get the best of Douglas. Caine is superb channeling an unassuming faux innocence and civility which mask a will of iron and—his seductive trademark—gentlemanly ruthlessness. The desert trip is pure top-notch survivalist adventure: an oasis massacre, cat-and-mouse with German tanks, and an extended, suspenseful sequence involving Leech's amazing plan to construct pulleys to lift vehicles



up mountainsides, only partially sabotaged by Leech. Without a single ally, Douglas grabs hold of this morally challenged group, imposing order—sort of—for nearly every mile there's another disaster, including, spectacularly, the commandeering of a German ambulance to tend one of their wounded, along with a feisty nurse (Pickles) who nearly everyone wants to rape. The team discovers the fuel depot is a fake, but Douglas locates its real location and intends to complete the mission. Back at HQ, Blore has reached the same conclusion from aerial photographs; Masters is ordered to leak the names of the commandos to the enemy, for the Brits want to save the oil for themselves. One by one the team is picked off. United in desperation, Leech confides Blore was going to pay him 2,000 pounds if he kept Douglas alive. With this bittersweet knowledge, they don their Italian uniforms and go out to surrender to invading Brits when they meet a trigger-happy soldier who ignores their puny white flag. The whole of the film, in fact, the entirety of the Vietnam parallels, is caught in the commanding officer's insouciant shrug.

Nobility, right over might, doing the right thing similarly count for nothing in **Hombre** (1967), **They Shoot Horses, Don't They** (1969), and, more recently, **In the Valley of Elah** (2007), but the touchstone of the genre is Satan's win in the war of good vs. evil between mute avenger Gordon/"Silence" (Trintignant) and bounty hunter/killer Loco (Kinski) in **The Great Silence**. Trintignant and Kinski live up to their reputations, and with a grab bag of base characters, ambient depravity, surprise violence and arresting cinematography by Silvano Ippoliti, the film casts an hypnotic spell. One of the rare spaghetti westerns set in winter (26 tons of shaving cream simulated the snow-filled main street), its mood, acidic dialogue, cinematography especially, and even specific scenes involving characters and plot points set in stagecoaches are imitated in **The Hateful Eight** (2015); Quentin Tarantino likewise enlisted composer Ennio Morricone. At the outset, boy Gordon sees his parents



executed by killers hired by corrupt Utah justice of the peace Henry Pollicut (Pistilli); they slit his throat. Years later, in 1898, a severe blizzard hits Pollicut's fiefdom, Snow Hill, and everyone, suddenly a bandit, steals to survive, hunted by Pollicut's psychopathic bounty hunter Loco. Grown-up Gordon/"Silence" provokes these killers, slaying them in self-defense with his fancy, high-speed Mauser rifle. Enter the woman, Pauline (McGee), a widow whose husband was murdered by Loco, who petitions Silence to be her Sir Lancelot. Snow Hill is a debased scene, a microcosm of all humanity's shortcomings. Every interaction is transactional and losers lose extravagantly. Into this cesspool wades naïve Sheriff Burnett (Wolff), who arrests Loco for having beaten Silence and is rewarded with an icy death. Now the torture. Once Pauline and Silence become lovers, Loco's gang kidnaps her and Silence has his right hand burned. Loco challenges Silence to a duel. If Silence wins, all the "bandits" will be spared. The spaghetti western protag always has one more trick up his sleeve. We expect the magic moment, one of those clever close calls **The Good, The Bad and The Ugly** (1966) revels in, something special from the fancy rifle, but Silence is dead like Che Guevara and Malcolm X. Downbeat but magnificent, this must-see film ends in a stunning My Lai-like massacre. The despair is so powerful the film wasn't released theatrically in the U.S. until 2012. Extras include an appreciation of director Corbucci by filmmaker/fan Alex (**Repo Man**) Cox, a 1968 documentary **Western, Italian Style**, two alternate endings, original Italian and English-language versions, trailer and **Ending the Silence**, an essay by critic Simon Abrams.

Pair any one of these films with **Ulzana's Raid** (1973) for an uplifting evening of Cinema Despair. And then there's **Night of the Living Dead** and Ben's (Duane Jones) senseless murder—another more racially charged, politically attuned and socially jarring iteration of **Billy Budd** (1962)—the perpetual, undead cultural icon for the present-day. ♂

The Phantom's BEST OF THE WEST

ARROW ACADEMY

(\$39.95 Blu-ray) 9/18

THE HIRED HAND: SPECIAL EDITION (1971) 8881/2

D: Peter Fonda. Peter Fonda, Warren Oates, Verna Bloom, Robert Pratt, Severn Darden, Ted Markland. 93 mins.

Though largely ignored during its original theatrical release, Fonda's low-key 1971 sagebrush fable has rightly gained in respect over the years. In addition to directing, Fonda assumes the lead role of Harry Collings, a lean, laconic cowpoke who, after seven years on the trail, seeks to resume a relationship with long-abandoned wife Hannah (Bloom). After a burst of sudden violence claims the life of a young saddlemate (Pratt), Harry's shaken prairie partner Arch (Oates, excellent as ever here) decides to accompany his pal on his domestic quest. Much of the subsequent action focuses on Harry's attempts to reclaim Hannah's affection, working at first in the titular position before graduating to active husband duties. The leisurely paced film unfolds like a live-action painting in progress, thanks to celebrated cinematographer Vilmos Zsigmond's lush palettes and poetic dissolves, while Bruce Langhorne's lyrical, laid-back guitar score provides ideal aural support. Considerable credit likewise goes to scripter Alan Sharp, whose impressive western resume also includes Robert Aldrich's brilliant 1973 **Ulzana's Raid** and Ted Kotcheff's 1974 **Billy Two Hats** (VS #79). Arrow Academy's Special Edition blu-ray, meantime, arrives with a plethora of extras, including Fonda's audio commentary, the 2003 documentary **Return of the Hired Hand**, deleted scenes, **The Odd Man**, a 1978 documentary about Scottish screenwriters, including Alan Sharp, Fonda and Warren Oates at the National Film Theatre, theatrical trailers, TV and radio ads and an interview with filmmaker/fan Martin Scorsese.

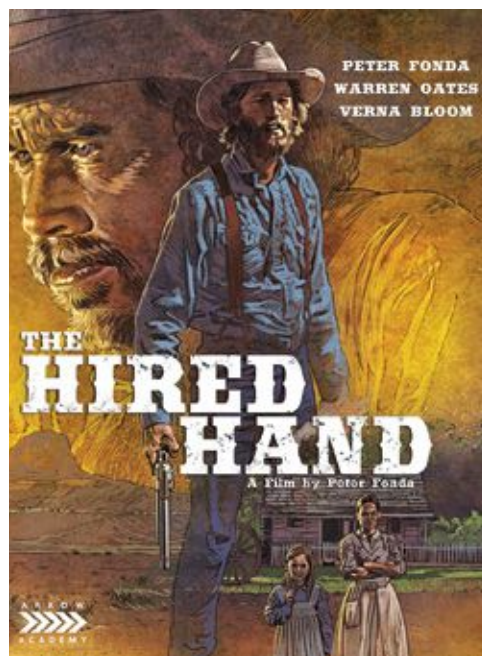
WARNER ARCHIVE

(\$21.99 Blu-ray) 7/18

THE LIFE AND TIMES OF JUDGE ROY BEAN (1972) 881/2

D: John Huston. Paul Newman, Jacqueline Bisset, Tab Hunter, John Huston, Stacy Keach, Roddy McDowall, Anthony Perkins, Victoria Principal. 123 mins.

Acting great Newman frequently wandered the Wild West, usually with positive results. His range experience included an early stint as a Method Billy the Kid in Arthur Penn's postmodern **The Left Handed Gun** (1958); an Oscar-winning turn as the eponymous amoral rancher in Martin Ritt's moody character study **Hud** (1963); an overly hyper Mexican bandito in Ritt's 1964 semi-misfire **The Outrage**, a frontier twist on Kurosawa's **Rashomon**; a complex, code-bound loner in Ritt's edgy **Hombre** (1967); a jaunty incarnation of a real-life outlaw in George Roy Hill's mega-hit **Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid** (1969); the titular self-made myth in Robert Altman's incisive **Buffalo Bill and the Indians, or Sitting Bull's History Lesson** (VS #94); and, here, in John Huston's decidedly mixed affair, **The Life and Times of Judge Roy Bean**. As scripted by John (The Wind and the Lion) Milius, **Bean** kicks off to a memorable start: Our parched antihero saunters into an isolated prairie bar/brothel seeking refuge from a possible pursuing posse after pulling a bank heist. The local lowlifes respond to Roy's outreach by robbing him, applying a severe beating, and tying him by the neck to his runaway horse, presumably to be dragged to his death. But the resilient Roy somehow survives the ordeal and immediately returns to administer harsh lethal justice to a dozen or so of his recent tormentors. Roy then claims the abandoned building as his own and turns it into a combo casino, cathouse and courtroom where he alone, armed with revolvers and a thick Texas law book, stands as the self-proclaimed Law West of the Pecos. The very loosely fact-based film continues in an entertaining tall tale vein, hosting cameos by the likes of Perkins as an itinerant preacher and his former off-screen partner Hunter as captured killer Sam Dodd, rounded up by Roy's own rough-hewn police force, until gradually falling prey to the cinematic self-indulgence that struck down many promising pics of the period. Suddenly, the tone shifts from revisionist irony to broad comedy as Roy adopts a beer-guzzling circus bear abandoned by medicine show huckster Huston as his best friend, orders his marshals to marry local whores, encounters cartoon villain Bad Bob (Keach), and engages in an epic struggle with would-be town developer Frank Gass (McDowall) that ultimately leads to a gratuitous **Wild Bunch**-style bloodbath. Apparently, writer Milius and director Huston were often at odds, with Milius crediting the experience as the stimulus to become a director with creative control; as it stands, the dual visions frequently collide with unsightly results. Worse, the pic features a cringe-worthy interruptive tune, "Marmalade, Molasses and Honey," extending a trend begun by **Butch Cassidy**'s annoying ditty "Raindrops Keep Falling on My Head" and continuing with **The Ballad of Cable Hogue**'s "Butterfly Mornin'," nearly as irritating as the incessant MTV music video inserts that burdened many an '80s flick. Still, the **The Life and Times of Judge Roy Bean** offers enough early-reel rewards to merit a viewing. 8



BEST OF THE SPAGHETTI WEST

WILD EAST PRODUCTIONS

(\$19.95 DVD)

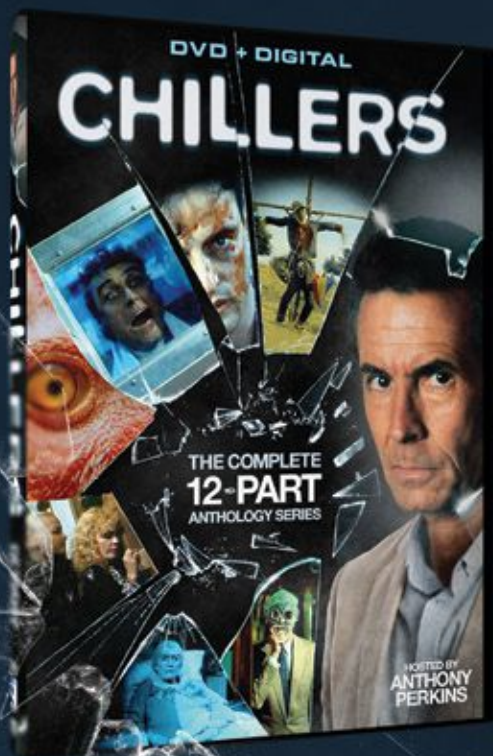
DAYS OF VENGEANCE (1967) 881/2

D: Florestano Vancini. Giuliano Gemma, Francisco Rabal, Gabriella Giorgelli, Conrado San Martin, Nieves Navarro. 123 mins.

Ted Barnett (Gemma) is doing hard time in a labor camp for a crime he did not commit. After working on a rather elaborate plan, he escapes and quickly puts some distance between himself and the camp. With the help of a grumpy old medicine man and his granddaughter Dulcy (Giorgelli), Ted gets back to Kartown and sets to righting the wrongs perpetrated against him. He learns that his gal Dolly (Navarro) left him to hook up with Cobb (San Martin), the local crook, and Cobb has the sheriff (Rabal) on his payroll. Ted learns of an arms deal with some Mexicans and does what he can to gum up the works. There's a big shootout, but Ted ends up with his neck in a noose anyway. Who or what will save him? It occurred to me while I was watching this that about 50 percent of all the Spaghetti westerns ever made are about an innocent man trying to clear his name and get revenge on whoever set him up. Of those films, Giuliano Gemma seems to play the luckless gunslinger in 50 percent of them. Which is to say that a feeling of "been here, seen it" settled in way before the closing moments. This is still a fun flick, and Gemma shines in a couple of scenes, particularly when he is dealing with the Mexican bandits, but he did this film better a couple of other times. Still, this is a worthy find, the first time the full English version has been released in the U.S., so **Days of Vengeance** reps a major release for Gemma fans. Extras include the original English titles and an interview with Nieves Navarro. The second film on this Gemma double feature is a departure, a Vikings vs. Indians tale starring Gemma and Gordon Mitchell, **Erik the Viking** (1965). 8

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They Came From The Basement!

By John Seal

RANSOM! THE POLICE ARE LOOKING ON (1973) ♂♂♂

D: Roberto Infascelli. Enrico Maria Salerno, Lee J. Cobb, Luciana Paluzzi, Jean Sorel, Laura Belli, Enrico Osterman. 95 mins. (n.i.d.)

While I'm a big fan of the *poliziotteschi*, that special cinematic blend of crime, constabulary corruption, and car chases that ruled the Italian box office during the 1970s, it must be acknowledged that—as with every other genre, of course—not all of them were brilliant. Many lesser examples of the style are muddled, badly written, filled with endless oceans of ugly clothing and verdant moustaches, and—worst sin of all!—boring.

Bar the unavoidable fashion *faux pas* and facial hair, **Ransom! The Police Are Looking On** (*La polizia sta a gauradre*) commits none of these sins. One of the finest *poliziotteschi* ever made, it's blessed with a terrific cast, a tight script, and a truly great Stelvio Cipriani score—and richly deserves rescue from the vast refuse heap of forgotten films currently consigned to reels of deteriorating magnetic tape.

Looking strangely like Jerry Stiller, Salerno stars as Milan's new police commissioner, Cardone. A small-town cop transplanted to the big city, Cardone has replaced previous commish Jovine (Lee J. Cobb, extremely bald but happily allowed to deliver dialogue in his own voice), whose inability to prevent a series of kidnappings has cost him political support and forced him to take early retirement. Cardone yearns to bring some backwoods justice to the big city in his effort to end its crime wave, but by-the-book District Attorney Aloisi (Sorel) isn't keen on taking the Dirty Harry approach to law enforcement. Aloisi insists that the law must be respected in all particulars—even if it means that murderous thugs like Vergano (Osterman) can get a gun permit if his application is in order (which it is).

Indeed, Vergano is suspected of involvement in the recent rash of kidnappings, and Police Captain Zenoni (Giani Bonagura, sporting some of the worst teeth to ever grace the big screen), is keeping a beady eye on him. Also in his sights is Senora Bellotti (Paluzzi), the mother of a previous victim who already paid a 400,000,000 lire ransom for the return of her son and is now the kidnappers' preferred go-between because of a secondary blackmail scheme.



But wait, there's more! Local bistro operator Laura Ponti (Belli) is also a person of interest, as several victims—including her own boyfriend—were known to gather at her watering hole. And then there's Cardone's son Massimo (Giam Battista Salerno—the internet does not reveal whether or not he's related to Enrico Maria), who foolishly decides to join his papa in the big city and pays the price, inadvertently (if somewhat predictably) being responsible for the film's climactic car chase (without giving too much away, his situation puts his father's "never pay ransom" principles to the test).

Ransom! benefits from each of these intriguing subplots, woven together into a cohesive and riveting whole by writers Augusto Caminito, Marcello D'Amico, and Roberto Infascelli (the last of whom also directed). Though the film's final reel reveal might stretch credulity a little when watched through 21st century eyes, it surely would have rung true for Italian filmgoers of the period, who were inured to levels of corruption and bureaucratic indifference that Donald Trump still only aspires to match.

Dubbing largely prevents one from passing accurate judgment on the quality of the film's thesping, but it must be said that the undubbed Cobb delivers an excellent performance as the former head cop. Until his death in 1976, Cobb spent his final years working in Europe—probably because that was where the money was—but never phoned it in. The man was a consummate professional to the end.

One of many European crime dramas released on Greek VHS, then bootlegged via the grey market, **Ransom!** looks, I am sorry to report, absolutely horrible in its present state. There's no other way to describe it: the film's image is badly degraded and distorted, and of course careless pan-and-scanning only makes matters worse. Nonetheless, it's clear that this is an excellent film deserving rediscovery and good enough to warrant a digital restoration by a top-rank company like Criterion or Kino Lorber. If neither of them are up to the task, the well-regarded Arrow Video would be an obvious and worthy alternative. ♂

THE TRUTH FROM THE BOOTH Confessions of a Film Projectionist By Tim Ferrante

BIJOU BOOTY!

As a projectionist in the '70s working in a variety of theatres, opportunities were plentiful to search for forgotten stashes of movie posters and other promotional materials.

In the manager's office of the Airport Plaza Theatre in Hazlet, NJ, there lay a juicy stack of one sheets but they were the known supply and the titles were not that old. There had to be more somewhere, so one night I went on a hunt. Outside the booth was a tight room where marquee letters were stored and the rest was occupied by gnarling heating and air conditioning ducts that rose close to the ceiling. I grabbed a small ladder and flashlight and investigated the top of them.

A large accordion folder! Covered with dust and tossed up there who knows when. I brought it into the booth. Inside were one sheets—**The Comedy of Terrors** (1963), **Godzilla vs. the Thing** (1964), **The Green Slime** (1968), Elvis Presley movies—jackpot!

It seemed the air conditioning rooms were a favorite dumping ground. The one in Hazlet's UA Twin Cinemas had a stack of standees where I rescued one for **Dracula vs. Frankenstein**. Long-time friend Sam Sherman, the film's producer, later told me that he couldn't have made more than 25 of them.

In my beloved Colonial Theatre in Keansburg, NJ, I discovered dozens of the gimmick masks for **The Mask** (1961) that were used to watch the 3D segments of the movie. They were tucked in an old filing cabinet inside the cleaning supplies room. Alongside them were promotional Viewmaster 3D reels for **Fort Ti** (1953) and a wad of **Plague of the Zombies** (1966) "eyes" that the trailer and TV spot specified were for girls! It was an exciting find.

But it was in the ancient Carlton Theatre (now the Count Basie Theatre) in Red Bank, NJ, where I stumbled on the oldest discovery. I ventured through a small door that gave access to the in-between space under the balcony seats and the ceiling below. It was filthy and there was no evidence of anything special. Except for a tightly folded bit of paper. In my flashlight's glow I unfolded it, revealing a handbill from 1928 for a silent exploitation film entitled **Road to Ruin**. A teenage girl falls prey to sex and drugs! This little goodie had been lying there for 50 years.

And this is where I wrap with, "Yes, I miss those days." ♂



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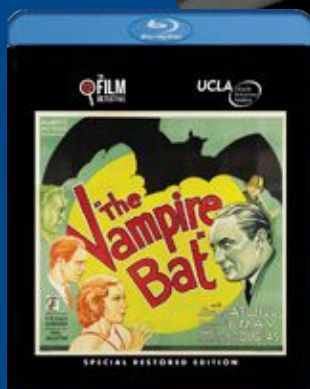
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Dan Cziraky's MSTIE MADNESS!

MST3K: THE SINGLES COLLECTION (2018) 888

D: Various. Joel Hodgson, Trace Beaulieu, Kevin Murphy, Frank Conniff, J. Elvis Weinstein. 540 mins. (Shout! Factory 5-disc \$54.97) 5/18

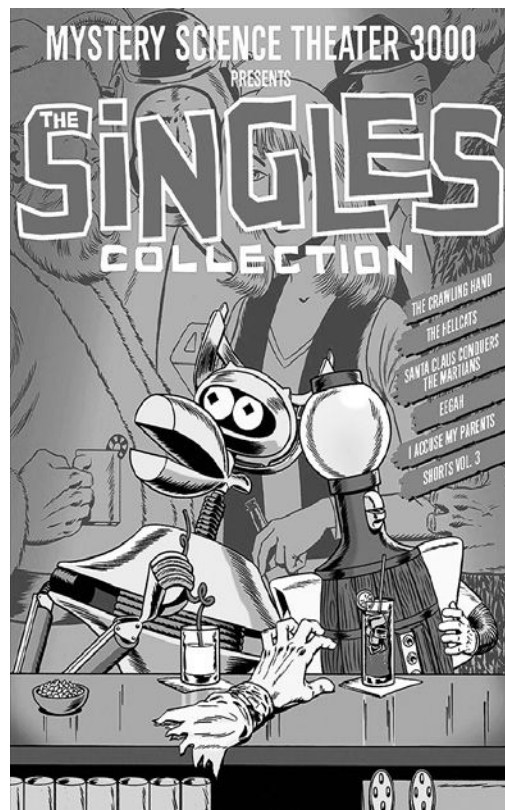
In the early days of **Mystery Science Theater 3000** DVD releases by Rhino Home Video, films were only issued individually (or, in one case, paired). Later, they were arranged into the numbered volumes that would house episodes for nearly two decades—first at Rhino, then by Shout! Factory. **MST3K: The Singles Collection** contains those out-of-print episodes from way back, brought under one roof for the first time. Oddly enough, these are all episodes featuring series creator and original host, Joel.

Disc 1: **The Crawling Hand** (1963, Experiment 106) starts with a space mission to the Moon failing when the astronaut runs out of oxygen before returning to Earth. When the astronaut calls Mission Control and begs that they blow up his capsule because he's being controlled by some unknown force, his severed hand (also guided by the alien force) washes up on a California beach. The hand is found by moody teen Paul (singer Rod Lauren) and his Swedish exchange student girlfriend. (Crow: "He looks like a cross between Jerry Mathers and James Dean." Servo: "'Beaver Without a Cause.'") Soon both go on respective killer rampages. The scientists from earlier in the film arrive on scene to stop the slaughter. Joel and the 'bots aren't impressed by the tedious plotting. Servo: "I wonder if there's an abridged version of this movie?" Crow: "If there is, let's burn it." On the Satellite of Love, Joel introduces his Scary Safety Saw during the Invention Exchange, while the Mads demonstrate the Limb Lengthener. Joel and the 'bots do Shatner-acting with their own crawling hands. Really, a bad print of a talky black-and-white teen sci-fi thriller with adequate riffing and somewhat weak host segments doesn't make for the best episode. Through most of Season 1 the concept was still being refined and polished into the **MST3K** we now love. In fact, this episode is the first time for the familiar opening segment: following the theme song, we pull out into the door sequence and arrive at the bridge of the SOL, instead of cutting to Deep 13. This is also the first episode in which Magic Voice announces "30 seconds to commercial sign," "Commercial sign in 15 seconds" and "Commercial sign in 5-4-3-2-1...commercial sign now." The theater seats and silhouettes are tinted green, so they don't get lost in the

darker hues of the film print. Extras include **Don't Knock the Srock** featurette (a portrait of **The Crawling Hand** director Herbert Srock) and the theatrical trailer.

Disc 2: **The Hellcats** (1967, Experiment 209) has the brother (Ross Hagen) and fiancée of a murdered detective infiltrate an all-female, drug-running biker gang. On the SoL, Joel and the 'bots all have colds. The Invention Exchange features Joel's Sign Language Translator; the Mads are still riding their Hobby Hogs from the previous episode. Joel uses a vaporizer that causes flashbacks. (Because of previous commitments, the writers turned this into a flashback episode, so that writing could be limited mostly to the riffing.) During one of the biker gang parties, Joel and the 'bots start assigning names to random bikers, including "Bingo," "Drooper," "Fleagle," and "Snorkie" (yes, **The Banana Splits**!). The '60s biker lingo gets confusing as well as tedious. When a song called "Mass Confusion" plays, Crow insists, "They're talking about the plot, Joel!" Tom's flashback is when they all do Shatner with **The Crawling Hand**. Crow's flashback is a Zero Gravity Humor lesson (from **Rocketship X-M**, episode 201). Joel's flashback is the "gobos" lesson (from **Jungle Goddess**, episode 203). During a gang fight, Joel comments, "This reminds me of 'The Battle of the Network Scum.'" Originally out on Rhino DVD in 2002.

Disc 3: **Santa Claus Conquers the Martians** (1964, Experiment 321) finds the children of Mars entranced by Christmas and Santa Claus, so their parents are determined to kidnap Santa Claus and bring him to Mars. A pair of Earth children, a cardboard robot, and Pia Zadora all somehow figure into this low-budget mishmash from Joseph E. Levine. The movie supposedly was filmed in some abandoned airplane hangars near the Roosevelt Field Mall in Long Island, New York (and looks it). When a Martian orders their robot to "Crush him!" Tom Servo shouts, "You were adopted!" The Martian weapons are barely disguised Wham-O Air Blasters. On the SoL, during the Invention Exchange the Mads show off their Wish Squisher; Joel and the 'bots display their versions of Misfit Toys (Toaster Dolls, **Roadhouse** Board Game, Easy-Bake Pig Iron Foundry, and Mr. Mashed Potato Head). Perhaps the most famous segment is the introduction of Crow's new Christmas Carol, "A Patrick Swayze Christmas," based on the film **Roadhouse**. Joel Hodgson has said that seeing the trailer for this film as a kid was a real inspiration and that when the chance came to use it on **MST3K**, he jumped at it. It's also why K. Gordon Murray's **Santa Claus** (1958) was used during the Sci-Fi Channel episodes, and why **The Christmas That Almost Wasn't** (1966) made it into Season 11 on Netflix. This episode was included in Rhino's **Mystery Science Theater 3000: The Essentials (VS #53)**. Bonus features: new episode introduction by series creator Joel Hodgson, **MST Hour** Wraps, and trailer.



Disc 4: **Eegah** (1962, Experiment 506) starts with a teen girl running into a gigantic caveman (Richard Kiel) on a desert road at night. At first her weird-faced boyfriend (Servo: "Cabbage Patch Elvis") and her scientist dad discover don't believe her, but they find a footprint in the sand ("Watch out for snakes!") that convinces doughy Dad to go searching for the caveman. When Dad discovers the bearded giant and disappears, Roxy and Tom head out in his dune buggy so she can repeatedly yell "Wheel!" ("Stop saying 'wheel!' Nobody says 'wheel!'") While Tom searches for Roxy's dad, Eegah makes his move and kidnaps her from the dune buggy. He's fascinated by Roxy's perfume ("He went to the Torgo school of fondling"), and tells his mummified relatives all about her. The scenes in the cave with Roxy's dad cheerfully suggesting she give in to Eegah's romantic advances—particularly the horrifying shaving scene—are the very dictionary definition of "icky." Once Tom rescues Roxy and her dad, Eegah follows them back to town and wreaks havoc. Crow: "This movie isn't healthy for children and other living things." On the SoL, Crow has been frozen to nearly absolute zero! During the Invention Exchange, Joel presents the Porkorina, while Dr. Forrester (Beaulieu) replaces TV's Frank's (Conniff) blood with antifreeze. The bots attempt to surgically alter Joel's face to look like Arch Hall Jr. Joel has to wash the movie off the bots; Frank gets a fluid change from Dr. F. This was the first episode released on DVD by Rhino, in April of 2000—which was probably the last time I watched this one. Extras include new episode introduction by Hodgson and the theatrical trailer. The uncut version of the film came on the original DVD, on the same side of the disc as the **MST3K** episode.

Disc 5: **I Accuse My Parents** (1944, Experiment 507). First we have a short, **The Truck Farmer** (1954), a look at the then-new techniques that enabled farmers to rush produce to market—most of which involved cheap, abused manual labor, just like today: “A pre-teen is put to work; her beauty will soon fade.” The main feature tells the story of Jimmy, an essay-contest-winning youth about to graduate from high school, ruined by—but in utter denial about—his boozy, neglectful parents, who gets involved with gangsters after falling for a nightclub singer. (Joel: “Could somebody please do an intervention?”) Dunderheaded Jimmy is soon up to his eyeballs in crime and encounters a friendly cafe owner who helps set him straight over a burger and French fries. The story pretty much predicts “affluenza” by 70 years. On the SoL, Tom Servo gets painted nude. During the Invention Exchange, Frank presents the Cake ‘N’ Shake for exotic dancers; Joel and the ‘bots have the Junk Drawer Organizer. Gypsy and the crew reenact the nightclub scene from the movie, while the Mads dig out “Rodney” from the Cake ‘N’ Shake. DVD extras include a **Man on Poverty Row: The Films of Sam Newfield** featurette, new episode intro by Hodgson, and the **MST Hour Wraps** with Mike Nelson. Originally released by Rhino in 2000.

Disc 6: **Shorts Volume 3** The seven shorts featured are: **Speech: Using Your Voice** (Joel: “It’s an Aunt Bea convention!”), **Aquatic Wizards** (Servo: “Skiing ostriches!”), **Is This Love?** (Servo: “Is This Love...or is it just rough sex with Michael Douglas?”), later re-released with **Teen-Age Strangler**, issued in Volume 10 and again in the revised Volume 10.2., **Design for Dreaming** (an annoyingly perky single woman dreams about the cars, kitchens and fashions of “tomorrow”), **The Selling Wizard** (suds manufacturer Anheiser-Busch pushes self-service freezers to grocery stores, later re-released with its original episode, **The Dead Talk Back**, as part of Volume 8), **Out of This World** (Satan and an Angel play with the life of a bakery delivery man on a bet) and **Once Upon a Honeymoon** (a Charles Nelson Reilly-esque angel has to help a newlywed couple make their honeymoon by granting the bride a new kitchen (Servo: “What the hell was that about, anyway?”)—this one was re-released via Shout! Factory with **Night of the Blood Beast** included on Volume XVI.

And so, we come to what could be the last of the classic episodes (1989-1999) of **MST3K** in a multi-disc collection. Season 12 will debut on Netflix later this year. Shout! is still hopeful that individual classic-era films may become available in the future. But then, any single episode is better than an entire season of **Fear My 600 lbs. Teen Mom Extreme Kitchen Takeover**. ☘

TERROR-VIDEO!

TRILOGY OF TERROR (1975) ☘☘☘

D: Dan Curtis. Karen Black, Robert Burton, John Karlen, Gregory Harrison, George Gaynes. 72 mins. (Kino Lorber Films \$29.95 Blu-ray) 10/18

This popular TV anthology film is probably best remembered for its final episode, **Amelia**, wherein star Black is terrorized by a 12-inch Zuni fetish hunter doll. Mr. **Dark Shadows** himself, Dan Curtis, directed the trilogy, based on stories by Richard Matheson and a screenplay written by Matheson and William F. Nolan. Black is featured in all three episodes, in a total of four separate roles. The first, **Julie**, concerns a mousy English teacher who is blackmailed into an affair by sleazy male student Chad Foster (Burton). Unbeknownst to Chad, his slick moves weren't as slick as he originally thought. (The best part of this episode unfolds when Chad takes Julie to a drive-in to check out an old French vampire flick. Turns out to be black-and-white snippets from the Curtis/Matheson TV vampire classic **The Night Stalker**.) In **Millicent and Therese**, two sisters vie for the attention of a doctor (Gaynes). Millicent is the uptight biddy while Therese is the blond bimbo, everyone's favorite sister. Personalities clash until the bloody climax. (Regular readers of Robert Bloch should be able to figure this one out early on.) The final and most “stuck-in-the-brain” story, the aforementioned **Amelia**, pits Black against the Zuni devil doll from Hell. The strongest of the trio, **Amelia** is scary and nasty and will make you jump no matter how many **Child's Play**, **Dolly Dearest** or **Annabelle** flicks you've seen. (This screeching little knife-throwing sucker is really a mean SOB!) More than 40 years after its initial airing, **Trilogy of Terror** may seem a bit tepid, but realize first that without this groundbreaking tele-film, we might never have had **Tales from the Darkside**, **Monsters, Dark-room**, **The Hitch-hiker**, **Friday the 13: The Series**, **American Horror Story** or any of the other countless TV horror anthologies we've enjoyed over the decades. Curtis followed up with a sequel in 1996, **Trilogy of Terror II** (VS #22), also based on a screenplay by Richard Matheson and William F. Nolan and featuring the return of the Zuni doll. Extras on Kino's 4k restoration Blu-ray Special Edition include an audio commentary by film historian Richard Harland Smith, a vintage commentary track by actress Black and writer Nolan, a new interview with composer Bob Cobert, the featurettes **Richard Matheson: Terror Tribute** and **Three Colors Black**, a limited edition booklet and newly commissioned art by Jacob Philips. ☘

—Rob Freese

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BOOK BONUS

DEUCE MUST BE DA PLACE!

A WHOLE BAG OF CRAZY: Sordid Tales Of Hookers, Weed, and Grindhouse Movies
By Pete Chiarella. Happy Cloud Media, LLC.
Softcover. Photo illustrated. 224 pages. April 2018. \$14.99.

Pete Chiarella was a tall, skinny Italian kid, fresh out of West Orange High School class of 1970. Spending weekends in New York City, on the hunt for horror movies and grindhouse features, prowling obscure book stores for movie posters and lobby cards, he got an education that school never prepared him for: 42nd Street in its grimy, wild, twisted glory days. An early childhood education (or misspent youth) at The Embassy Theater in Orange, NJ, may have given him the basics he needed, but the siren song of the Rotten Apple (where the drinking age was just 18) was alluring, to say the least. The Deuce offered pot, porn, booze, and all other types of thrills, and the kid who didn't seem to fit in anywhere finally found his tribe. Witness the birth of “42nd Street Pete” as he recounts tales of criminal activity, classic undesirable cinema, pot, booze, pros, cons, and 'hos. Meet the characters that shaped the era, such as Norm Brill, Al Goldstein, Seka, Sharon Mitchell, and other adults-only entrepreneurs. Enter the doors of Show World and other, long-gone pleasure palaces. I graduated high school in 1980 and used to take the PATH trains into Manhattan with my friends. Some of these places were still around then, but reading the behind-the-scenes stories from an insider is always way more fun. If you were a denizen of The Deuce then, you'll get a nostalgic kick out of it. If you want to know what 42nd Street was like before it became sterilized and Disneyfied, this book is for you. ☘

—Dan Cziraky

FERD & BEVERLY SEBASTIAN GATOR BAITING FOR FUN & PROFIT!

*As Told To
Terry & Tiffany DuFoe*

First Couple of the Drive-in Ferd & Beverly Sebastian gained alfresco fame with their iconic 1972 exploitation actioner **Gator Bait**, starring Playmate of the Year Claudia Jennings. The pair likewise contributed such ozoner and VHS fare as **Gator Bait 2: Cajun Justice**, **Running Cool**, **The Single Girls**, **Flash and the Firecat**, **American Angels: Baptism of Blood** and **Rocktober Blood**. Like his fellow filmmakers, **Ilsa** star Dyanne Thorne and her producer husband Howard Maurer (**VS #102**), Ferd Sebastian later went the religious route, becoming an ordained minister in 1999. Beverly, meanwhile, heads the canine rescue and rehabilitation organization the Greyhound Foundation (www.4Greyhounds.org).

With their filmmaker sons Ben and Tracy Sebastian, Ferd & Beverly have made much of their cinematic oeuvre available on YouTube and disc, with a Blu-ray special edition planned for their 1989 heavy metal horror **Rocktober Blood**. Our dynamic dad/daughter duo, Terry and Tiffany DuFoe, recently tracked down the busy Sebastians for the following interview.

TERRY DUFOE *You guys have been together since you were like 18 and 19. What is the secret to why your marriage lasted so long?*

BEVERLY SEBASTIAN Well, in marriage you have to have two bosses, right? So our secret is Ferd lets me think I'm boss, and I let him think he's boss! And for over 65 years it's worked! We have worked in business and lived together.

FERD SEBASTIAN Do you want to know the *real* secret? We both are bosses, but we separate our business. She's the producer. I'm the director. On a couple of films, we switched those roles. When we're on the set and we're working and I'm directing actors and stuff, I'm the last word. We want each others' input, but if I say, "No, I'm going to do it this way," then that's the way I'm going to do it. The same goes when we're getting ready to distribute and sell the film. I would take any deal that came along that was more than I'd put in it, but she says, "No!" She makes the deals. Right from the beginning of the film, we will both write it, but then I will sit and I will read it. When I read it, I see every visual in there and I hear the music with it as I read it. I will set my watch on the table and click

it when I start and as I read it, I play each scene in my mind. So I'll know this scene is going to last three minutes. This one is going to be two-and-a-half minutes. This one's going to be five minutes. So when I edit it, it's very simple. I'm just putting the pieces back together the way I saw them to begin with.

BS I do the same thing when I write it. I visualize it. These characters are very real to me and I know what they're doing, how long they do it, and the whole bit. Meshing it in the editing room is where we get into the fun.

TD *How did you guys first meet Claudia Jennings? I believe I read that you, Beverly, had started out your career working with people like Roger Corman and also American International?*

BS I didn't work with them. I knew them. I was like a little ant looking at an elephant with you know what in its eye. Corman and AIP, they always wanted our movies and we were so crazy that if they didn't give us enough money, they didn't get the movie. But they still wanted them. Anyways, it didn't work out, but we met Claudia when we were casting **The Single Girls** and it was an instant rapport with her and Ferd and I. We did that film and then after that was when she wanted to make another one. She would've made as many pictures as we would've put her in.

TD *She was beautiful but she seemed like just a down-to-earth person.*

BS She was a very down-home person. She once told me, "Beverly, if I didn't love you so much, I'd go after your man." I said, "Try it, Claudia, and you won't have red hair anymore!" We wrote **Gator Bait** with her in mind.

FS I'll tell ya, for the movie, she did a great part.

BS She did great. She was absolutely perfect in the part and we used to cast all of our people using typecasting. That was what was the easiest thing for us to do. Get the one that looked the part. Get them to act natural and learn the script.

FS She said, "I want a role that I don't have to talk in. You know, just a couple of lines. That's it." So we wrote **Gator Bait** and she doesn't say a whole lot in there, but she really was perfect. She was just a great person and she just worked with you so hard. We opened down in Louisiana, and she would go around to the drive-in theaters looking like she was going to Grauman's Chinese or something. We had just great openings everywhere with that show.

TD *What did she think about having to get down into the swamp?*

BS Oh my God, she did most of her own stunts in that film. If I had a snake thing, she'd get right there in the middle of it. She'd go from us to Roger Corman with his higher, more expensive sets, but she'd get right down there in the middle.



FS We were in the swamps and SAG got on us about that. They said, "Where are your honeywagons?" I said, "We don't have honeywagons. We have girl trees and boy trees!"

BS That's what they call a "hardship film."

FS The actors all signed off on it. It would've just been too much. We couldn't even have got them [the honeywagons] back there.

TD *When you were working on films like Gator Bait 1 and 2, how did the animal wrangling go? You were dealing with gators and crocs and snakes. Did you have a professional on set?*

FS Oh yeah, we had real professionals—we had real Cajun boys! We had real swamp boys out there and we paid...what did we pay, Bev?

BS We paid 50 cents a snake!

FS Yes, 50 cents a snake.

BS Kids from everywhere came with these snakes.

FS We rented a whole motel out in the swamp. It was going broke. It was just way out in the country and the swamps were all around it and it had a swimming pool in the middle. The swimming pool was kind of green because it hadn't been used in two years probably when we got this place. So we put all of our alligators in the swimming pool.

“We had something that was making money and everybody loves you when you’ve got something making money.”

**Beverly Sebastian
on *Gator Bait***

BS Our actor alligators! The rest of them were in the swamp! I’m petrified of snakes, but Claudia was not scared of nothing like that. We had to really watch her. She liked to have her foot on the side of the boat and we had a real close call with her because we had an alligator jump up on the side of the boat. If she hadn’t gotten her foot moved any faster, she wouldn’t have had a foot! But she sort of realized that they really are wild.

FS The man that was going to distribute it was going to give me \$200,000 for the rights to it. When we got it finished, he didn’t have the money. So we decided that we’re going to have to do something different with this one.

BS That’s when we went into distribution.

FS Beverly went into distribution. That was her deal, but I just helped. We said, “You know, we aren’t going to deal with any of these people in New York or Los Angeles. Let’s go back home and find out what we can do there. Where we know the people.” We saw the biggest film theater owner in Louisiana. We got an appointment with him and his booker. They said, “What do you have that we need? You say you’ve got a good show here and how do we know that? What have you got to sell?” I made a picture of Claudia. They usually have one sheets and this one was like a two-sheet. It was six-foot tall. It was a life-size picture of her up sitting on a log with her leg up and gun across her or something. We unrolled that and they all looked at it and said, “That’s a deal!”

BS They gave me all of the theaters that they had. The chain was Gulf State, I believe was the name of it. I didn’t even know what the word “booker” was! A booker in the film business is someone that books films. That’s logical, isn’t it? I didn’t know what they were, so the head of the company gave me his head booker and said, “Go teach this lady how to book these films!”

TD Was there anything that was going on in film distribution like there was in music distribution? There was a lot of Mafia involvement and payola with music distribution.

BS No, I never had any problems like that because we had *Gator Bait*. We had something that was making money and everybody loves you when you’ve got something making money. They all want it. We never had any problems like that even when we came to New York. We played in top houses.

FS *Gator Bait* really put us in the movie business and I’ll tell you why. We didn’t distribute before. *The Hitchhikers* we made for \$45,000. When I would put a movie into distribution, I always would double my money, so that would be \$90,000. I’d get \$90,000 in advance for it and anything else I got, I’d just kiss him! *Hitchhikers* did good and we probably made maybe \$300,000, which was one heck of a lot of money for us. Anyway, what we did with *Gator Bait* was we spent most all of our money making the film. I went to the lab and said, “We need some prints, but I don’t have any money.” They said, “Ferd, you’ve always paid us. We don’t care. Get as many prints as you want and you can just pay us when you can.” I said, “I don’t want to get what I really need, but I’ll get 20.” So we got 20 and we played the state of Louisiana with 20! When we did that, I said, “Let’s do this like a Hollywood opening.” We’re playing a drive-in. We take Claudia down there and we charter a little airplane to tote the three of us and the pilot. We go from one of these drive-ins to the next, across the state. We bring Claudia into the concession stands and she’s dressed like—oh, she’s gorgeous!

BS A see-through blouse! You take her down to Louisiana, where they’ve never had a star come down through their dinky little airport, and oh my God!

FS She was Playmate of the Year! They were thinking this was better than having the President in town! So we flew her all over the state. Long story short, the first week in Louisiana...

BS We did \$500,000!

FS Well, I was going to say a half million.

BS Well, it is!

FS It sounds better! But we made \$500,000 and I said, “Beverly, we’re in the distribution business! This is better than anything I’ve ever seen! We never did this with any of these other distributors!”

TD You did good making the big premiere there because to them *Gator Bait* was home movies.

BS You want to go back where your audience is. That’s what we did. We took our picture to the people that wanted to see her and that’s why it was so successful. That’s why all of our films have been successful, though.

THEY’RE JUST UP THE ROAD...WAITING FOR YOU...ALL YOUNG AND SMILES!

YOU STOP... YOU GOT BIG TROUBLES!



Starring MISTY ROWE • NORMAN KLAR • LINDA AVERY
with TAMMY GIBBS • KATHY STUTSMAN • MARY THATCHER • BLUE ANKENIE
Written, Produced & Directed by FERD & BEVERLY SEBASTIAN
Sebastian Trust

FS Disney got me straightened out early in my career. You can’t make a movie with a shotgun. In other words, you can’t please everybody. You got to do a movie with a rifle and that is you find the audience that you want to hit and you give him what he wants. We found with *Gator Bait* it didn’t make any difference if you were in Louisiana or if you were in Italy, a cab driver and a mechanic is a cab driver and a mechanic. They’re a working-type person. As a matter of fact, *Gator Bait* was the biggest independent film that had played in Europe.

BS They had never seen swamps like that.

FS Paramount picked it up and took it over there and that’s the biggest film that they had. Not to compete with the major films but with an independent film, that was the biggest film that was ever played in Europe.

TD Well, everyone likes half-naked Claudia and gators! I find humor though in the idea that Disney was helping to straighten you out on films that had nudity and guns.

BS When Ferd first got in the film business, Mr. Disney advised Ferd on the movie business when he submitted an idea for a picture to Mr. Disney. He gave him the advice that’s helped us everywhere. It’s the basis of making movies that are independent. One of them was, like he said, “know your audience.”

TD Of course, you also have to have a great title. One of your film titles is *The Love Clinic*. Now that says it all! I’ve never seen the film, but was it like *Masters & Johnson*?

“Time magazine did a story on Beverly and I in the earlier days and they called us the ‘Ma and Pa Kettle of the Movie Business.’”
Ferd Sebastian

FS It's a comedy and it's a great film. They have to tell all of their problems to a computer and the computer talks. And she falls in love with the computer!

BS We sold that film to Sumner Redstone, who now owns Paramount and everything else on God's earth. It went down to Georgia and made a huge amount of money.

FS If anybody has a copy of that film out there, let us know. I'd like to have it because the negatives on two films were burned up in a movie lab fire in Hollywood.

BS **I Need a Man** and **The Love Clinic**. We never got those.

FS **I Need** is the only picture we ever made in black and white and that was too artsy. That was very artsy. I mean, I sent it to France. They screened it and sent it back, and they wouldn't let it back in the United States. They said, “This is a French film.” I said, “No, it's not a French film. It's my film. It's an American film.” But anyways, those two films got burned up in the fire and got destroyed. Let me tell you a quick story on **I Need a Man**. We made this film and it has a little sex and it has a little of this but it's very artsy. It looks like a Fellini film or something. So we put this out and, of course, drive-ins are where we were drawn to. It wasn't making any money. If we put it in the downtown houses, it didn't make any money. We couldn't make any money out of this film.

BS San Jose, California, is where we put it in.

FS I didn't have a California distributor, but I found one. His name was Paul Martin. He put it in a drive-in theater in San Jose. We're used to this picture going out and if it makes \$1,000 a week, it's a big deal! I mean, that is a super big deal! He puts it in there and we get the first week's grosses and it's like \$12,500 or something like that. He's holding it over for another week and all this is happening. I said, “Good gracious, what is this?” Well, it's an old man out there that owns this drive-in theater and he's an old showman. He's been around forever and he took it. He put together a whole advertising campaign. He takes this one picture where the girl has her head thrown back, with her hair up there, and she's like screaming in ecstasy...

BS “I need a man!!!!”

FS He said the name of it and the picture says everything! So in the advertising campaign he put “I need a man...any man!”

BS I tell ya, the people that came to see that picture in the drive-in. My God, I would love to have interviewed them—because it had *nothing* in it! It was the story of a schizophrenic nymphomaniac! I met this woman on the street in Houston, Texas, and she was nuttier than a damn fruitcake! The girl was in the story, too!

FS It is exactly her story as she told it to us, all psychotic and crazy! And that's the way it is in the film.

TD One of our people we work with is a real drive-in aficionado and he's wondering if you're going to do a special release with **The Single Girls**?

BS Ferd just had all the new digital remasters done here. We got them from Los Angeles. He wants to release that on DVD. Are you going to do Blu-ray on those?

FS I'm doing Blu-ray on **Rocktober Blood** because we just had such a demand for it. We're going to do that on Blu-ray. The other ones that we'd like to talk about are **Running Cool** and **The Single Girls**. **Gator Bait 1** and **2**, they've been released for a few years and they went out on regular DVD. I don't know if there's a market for those. These are all drive-in type features basically. As a matter of fact, **Time** magazine did a story on Beverly and I in the earlier days and they called us the “Ma and Pa Kettle of the Movie Business.”

TD I received a letter from someone who thought that the actress [Jan Sebastian] in **Gator Bait 2** was your daughter but she was actually your daughter-in-law. There was speculation that she was also a GLOW wrestler?

BS Yes, she was! From **American Angels** we taught her all the wrestling and then she went and did all this wrestling stuff. I think her and [son] Ben did wrestling stuff on their own. They had a company that they did wrestling for.

FS We did **American Angels** with a Paramount release. It was pretty successful. As a matter of fact, we had some reviews on that thing, later reviews, even this year, wanting to know when it's going to be out.

BS Jan did a fantastic job in that movie. We had to have someone that could act, or halfway act like most of our people do. They're beginning actors. They could act and also do the wrestling. Jan said, “I can do it!” and when we tested her, she could. She did all of her work in that movie. She did one heck of a job.



FS All the other wrestlers were professional wrestlers. They choreographed the moves. All wrestlers do or they'd kill each other—that mat is hard! When you're up on the top rope and diving across and landing, it hurts. Wrestlers do not want that mat padded because when you start running across it to do these moves, you could trip or it could mess up your timing and you might hurt yourself or the other person really bad. So it has very, very little padding.

TD In **Gator Bait 2** you could tell she was confident because she was steering the boat with her foot!

BS Yes, she was! All of the kids that we have dealt with in the movies have been absolutely fantastic. Some of them have gone on and done bigger things, but we tell them, “You're going to do your own stunts” and they're all game! I'm sure there's a lot of kids like that today, too. But with ours, we were very lucky to have them.

TD How did **Gator Bait 2** come about? Were you worried about trying to do a sequel without Claudia, even though the lead role of **Gator Bait 2** was a different character? What was running through your mind when you were trying to recast the lead actress for the sequel?

BS Well, **Gator Bait 2** came about when we had a contract with Paramount Pictures. We made a contract for three or four films with them and **Gator Bait 2** was one they wanted to do. **American Angels**, **Running Cool** and another one that we were going to do was a Greyhound film called **Happy** that I never made. When we started to do that, I think Claudia was gone.

**“Jan did a good job but never would've replaced Claudia. Claudia was Claudia and that was it.”
Beverly Sebastian on
Jan Sebastian**

FS Yeah.

BS Claudia had died. She'd been killed. So the hardest thing was finding somebody that could replace her. Jan did a good job but never would've replaced Claudia. Claudia was Claudia and that was it. So the character became different. It came about because of our contract with Paramount. They were heavy into sequels.

TD It was kind of neat that in *Gator Bait 2* you had the little boy all grown up.

BS You know who that is? That's [son] Tracy Sebastian. His first talking role. Of course, the first role he ever did in his life was a Bank of America commercial at 18 months old with Farrah Fawcett. We discovered Farrah. She was a friend of Ferd's cousin at the University of Texas. That's how we cast her in these commercials.

FS This was the National Bank of Austin, Texas. They needed a TV commercial and at that time we weren't doing theatrical. We were doing TV commercials.



FS We went down there and I just asked my cousin Scott what was a really pretty girl there that could do this commercial. He got us with Farrah, and Farrah was real sweet and real nice. She did the job and she said, “You know, I really like this. I'd like to be in movies.” I said, “Okay, we will see if we can help you.” We took one of the commercials and Beverly sent it to Dick Clayton. He's an agent in Los Angeles. They called her immediately out there and about two weeks later she was going for *Charlie's Angels*. I tried to get her in another film one time and she came in and talked to Beverly and I about it. She said she'd love to do it, but then I saw her agent and he told me what she wanted for it. I said, “I'm sorry—you're out of my league now.”

TD I was surprised by how much you guys worked with Paramount.

FS We got in with them initially because of Ben, my older son. He was really an excellent tennis player. The president of Paramount was running this competition against other studios in tennis. So they got Ben and said, “You play with the Paramount team!” And he did that for about a year. Then they just naturally said, “What's your mom and dad do?” Around this time, drive-in theaters had about all closed up. Only a few were open. So we were playing mainly neighborhood hardtops, and Paramount was just really getting into home-video, so we signed with them. As a matter of fact, it was the same deal that we've always made with everybody, but people are astounded when you say a major did that for you. But anyway, we made a wonderful deal with them and they started distributing these.

TD You're not exactly totally retired. I know for a fact that many of your films are now available on a YouTube page.

FS We're running *The Hitchhikers*, *Gator Bait*, *Flash and the Firecat*, *On the Air Live with Captain Midnight*, *Rocktober Blood* and *American Angels*. Go to “Sebastian Films LTD” on YouTube. That will pull up a section on YouTube and all those are on that page.

TD As far as DVDs that are available, which are authorized releases from you guys?

BS We have a distributor that's handling our films right now. WaxWorks it's called.

TD I don't know what YouTube's rules are these days. Are they censored as far as nudity or is everything there?

FS Oh, everything's there. They're the theatrical versions.

BS Don't forget, those are G-rated films now that we made back 50 years ago!

TD You know, you're right. Back in the day, they were giving films “R” ratings, but you see them now and you think, “Wow, that's like Disney!”



FS Back then you had a flash of nudity and people said “Ooh!” and good luck getting it by the MPAA.

TD Considering some of the beautiful actresses you had, that flash was enough!

BS That was Claudia's favorite trick. She loved to have her denim shirt flash a little bit!

TD We interviewed Bobby Hart, her former boyfriend. He did some great music for all these *B* films. He did some music for you, too. He really thinks that she would still be around today if she hadn't gotten in with a bad crowd. Did you know that she was hanging out with some bad people?

BS Yeah. Claudia came down and stayed with us on our boat about two weeks before she was killed. She was petrified that someone was going to kill her. She stayed with us a couple of weeks, hiding out on our boat in Marina Del Ray. She was killed about two weeks later.

TD Was there ever any investigation into foul play? Everyone had just assumed that she had fallen asleep behind the wheel while driving.

BS Let me tell you, when she was killed in that wreck—Roger Corman had Claudia trained to drive 18-wheelers.

FS When she did *Truck Stop Women*.

BS She could drive like a maniac and for her to die in a car wreck like that, to me, was beyond belief. But no one did any investigation. It took a couple of days before anybody claimed her body.

TD We have a friend who interviewed actress Misty Rowe, who did **The Hitchhikers** for you guys. She didn't talk very kindly of the film. Did she give you an idea that she didn't think the movie was so good when she was making it?

BS All of the people that you find that have done nothing, they make an independent film with a low budget and they love it at the time. Then they become popular. She got **Hee Haw** off of it and all of this stuff. So then they don't want to have anything to do with those little dirty independents that they made. It happens every time, except with someone like Claudia. She would just stand right up to you and tell you what she thought. But that's what happens with most of them.

FS Let me tell you something about **The Hitchhikers**. The crew was three or four people. I was the director. I was the cameraman. I was the lighting man and I think we had a sound man. The picture before that, Beverly did the sound. I think we had a sound man for that one and Beverly was...

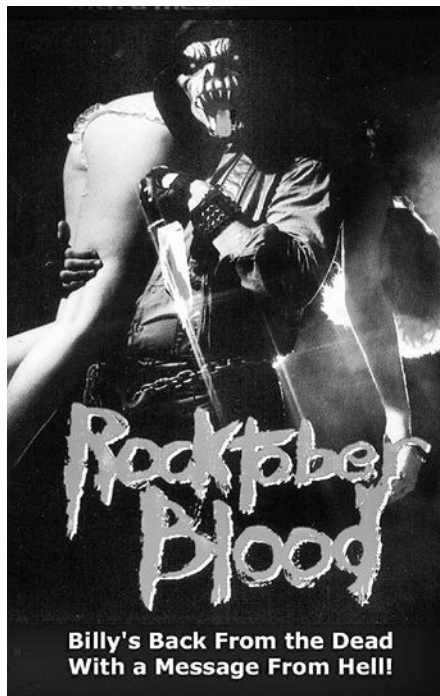
BS ...everything else!

FS So that picture didn't cost much to make. But we put **The Hitchhikers** on YouTube.

BS Of all the films on YouTube, that is the most-watched film. It's amazing!

FS More people look at that than look at **Gator Bait**. I don't know!

TD Now that your son is going to be trying to remake or make sequels for some of your films, is there any kind of urge that you might want to do some kind of a cameo?



BS We've stepped through almost all of our films we've ever done. You can find me or Ferd in them somewhere. We're like Hitchcock!

TD We've seen some of your films misrepresented or offered in unauthorized formats. We recently saw one on-demand service offer **The Single Girls**, but the film was actually an Italian film that was advertised with your **The Single Girls** movie poster.

BS You ought to see the stuff we find. On **Rocktober Blood** especially. I can't believe all the stuff that they just pick up and put on their websites. Entire scenes! In fact, we just pulled down something.

FS What happens is—like with talking about **The Single Girls**. It was never released except for theatrically. They didn't have video then. Somebody gets a print somewhere and they make a copy. Then they're out with it. I've seen some of these and I've tried to call the company and they're nonexistent! They've probably got three different names. If you think it's bad here, try anywhere in the Middle East. You don't fool with the Middle East, and the Orient is about as bad. Once they get something, that's it. How you going to go Iraq or someplace and sue somebody? I mean, they know you aren't coming over there.

BS That's the problem for the majors too, but they've got floors of lawyers that do nothing but that.

FS Any market that's worthwhile has this. That's why we were making so much money with Paramount because any market that's worthwhile has a team in France or Scandinavian countries or Canada or Australia. They have their own offices there. So when they come out, they just mass saturate it and it didn't behoove anybody to copy it.

TD Have you ever considered selling your films off to another company?

BS Oh, we have people all the time who ask. When you say sell, that is not a word I like. In fact, we just got **Rocktober Blood** back because Lionsgate had it. They had bought the rights from Vestron, who was the distributor and went bankrupt. Lionsgate picked it up and they've had it for 20 years or whatever they've done. We tracked it down and found where our originals were. I said, "You do not have the right to that motion picture." We got into the legal with them and they found out they didn't have the rights. They said, "Oh, we bought it." And I said, "They didn't own it to sell it to you!"

FS Three days later they came back and said, "You're right. We don't own it!"

BS We've never sold a film, the copyright for it, to anybody.

Desert Island Classics

Searching for a man was a way of life.



FS All of our films with Paramount are ours. We made the longest deal with them we ever made with somebody. Our contracts were for 20 years with Paramount. They've all expired and all those pictures are back.

BS All of our stuff is back. In fact, we just donated all of the materials that we had that Paramount had made for all of our films to UCLA.

TD I understand that, Beverly, you have a new documentary out. Can you tell us a little about that?

BS Yes. It's called **Greyhounds: Beyond Wonderful**. It is the history of greyhounds and the people that love them. I'm excited about it. Ben, our son, who runs Hollywood Independent Studios, is going to do most of the production for us. It's going to be a family film again.

FS Then we are doing something that Beverly and I haven't done before, and that's make an animated show. We've been so deeply in the greyhound business for the past 15-20 years that we really know the greyhounds, the tracks, the animals, everything about it. So this picture is going to be titled **One Happy Run**. It's about a greyhound named Happy, who's a race dog, and a young boy probably around 10-13 years old who is a problem child. He's kicked out of homes and he and the dog get together and together they're both winners by the end of the show.

BS I'll be interested to see how they do this film, my script, in animation. It'll be a new experience for me because I wrote it for people and with the dogs being able to talk in the film.

FS I'm tired of dealing with people! Like my son said, unlike actors, when we're done with them we can put them in a box and save them till next time! ☹

Nancy Naglin's ART-HOUSE VIDEO

NAZI BUSINESS

BYE BYE GERMANY (2017) 8881/2

D: Sam Garbarski. Moritz Bleibtreu, Antje Trause, Tim Seyfi, Mark Ivanier, Anatole Taubman, Hans Low, Pau Macsai. 102 mins. (Film Movement) 7/18

Salesman extraordinaire David Bermann (Bleibtreu) can spin a tale and crack a joke to survive anywhere. But he's survived concentration camps and is stuck in limbo with thousands of other displaced Jews trying to make ends meet, while planning to leave for the U.S., Israel, anywhere but Germany. Jews in Germany in 1946 represents a novel twist on holocaust cinema. (Only 4,000, including the director's family, decided to stay.) This surprising comedy, based on writer/director Garbarski's semi-biographical novels, shows the persecuted turning the tables on their tormentors with intimacy, humor, and irony while grappling with their own demons. Saints they're not; they're exactly who they were before they lost everything. Once-rich Bermann doesn't know why he can't get the proper license to open a business. He enlists the unassuming Holzmann (Ivanier), soon to be his bookkeeper, to launch his linen-selling venture. Soon Bermann has his salesmen—a former actor, resistance fighter and a kindred spirit who knows how to make German feel guilty—and is giving them lessons on how to turn housewives into customers. In the midst of testy interactions between Jews and Germans, each character gets the opportunity to tell his tragic tale. Suspected of having collaborated with Nazis, Bermann must relate his story to the no-nonsense Jewish-American lawyer investigating him as a potential war criminal. In a jarring departure from the winning verisimilitude of the rest of the film, Special Agent Sara Simon (Trause) is a self-assured 21st century creation with a Harvard degree (Harvard Law didn't admit women until 1950). The two become romantically curious as Simon teases out Bermann's cockamamie tale of being the camp authority's designated joke-teller, sent to tell Hitler a joke. Preposterous, yes! But this completely original, quirky, very funny comedic drama, rife with humor, horror, betrayal and suicide, is must-see. Extras include a short film, **Strings**.

HITLER'S HOLLYWOOD: GERMAN CINEMA IN THE AGE OF PROPAGANDA 1933-1945 (2017) B&W/Color 881/2

D: Rudiger Suchsland. Hans Albers, Heinz Ruhmann, Zarah Leander, Ilse Werner. 105 mins. (Kino Lorber) 6/18

In his first documentary **From Caligari to Hitler**, writer/director Suchsland surveyed the cinema of the Weimar Republic. In **Hitler's Hollywood**, Suchsland continues the exhaustive survey method, amassing an enormous cache of archival footage and interviews, unfortunately, not always organized in a clear and accessible manner. (For a far clearer picture of the same basic topic, see Felix Moeller's flawless **Forbidden Films** [VS #107].) The Nazi film industry, under the direction of Josef Goebbels, produced at least a thousand films—melodramas, romances, adventure quests and, as the war deteriorated, escapist fantasies—and examples of all genres are presented together with explanations of the propaganda thematic undercurrent: sacrifice for the fatherland, anti-Semitism, glorification of a sacrificial death, group submission to a Nazi ideal and more. Unfortunately, also, this history is narrated by Udo (Andy Warhol's **Frankenstein**) Kier, whose droning and rambling voice at times is hard to understand. The images flicker by—snippets of films come in rapid succession—so rapidly, in fact, it's often difficult to coordinate the director, stars and intent of the film and remember the various points about style, direction, a certain star's popularity or Nazi film history Kier is trying to demonstrate. Suchsland does succeed in showcasing examples of brilliant filmmaking (also Hollywood knock-offs) in service to a perverted goal. Certain facts stand out: Two thousand film professionals were driven out of Germany, including Fritz Lang and Marlene Dietrich, but those who remained post-war suffered few consequences. Detlef Sierch, for example, reinvented himself in Hollywood as Douglas Sirk. Descendants are left to struggle to explain the past. Halfway into this doc, the dizzying cascade of clips, wandering from topic to topic at a frenzied pace, seems crammed in to complete the timeline. Then it's time to give up and enjoy Suchsland's survey impressionistically, possibly the way he intended, and let the images, wrapped in Kier's cocooning harmony, wash over you with curiosity, interruption and fascination.

ART-HOUSE PHLASHBACK

BILLY BUDD (1962) B&W 88888

D: Peter Ustinov. Terence Stamp, Peter Ustinov, Robert Ryan, Melvyn Douglas, David McCallum. 122 mins. (Warner Archive) 7/18

This is the role that made Terence Stamp. Often overlooked is the stunning writing/directing/producer trifecta of visionary Ustinov who, according to Stamp's not-be-missed commentary, infused the film with timeless wisdom and



helped fashion the young Stamp as both actor and man. Herman Melville's endearing enigma, Billy Budd (is he naïf, Christ-like, homoerotic?) is impressed into His Majesty's Miserable Navy, confronted by evil incarnate in conniving master-of-arms Claggart (a towering Ryan in one of his finest malice-seeping roles) and doomed by the legalistic logic of the painfully decent Captain Vere (Ustinov). A closed society in thrall to laws and ideals tested by a possible mutiny and sworn to uphold a greater goal (the defeat of the French), the goodness of right intentions challenged by the veniality of men, **Billy Budd** sounds like a period piece. But Ustinov brilliantly recasts Melville's stab at **Paradise Lost** against the backdrop of '60s nuclear annihilation anxiety. A holy magic settles over the film, a combination of barefoot sailors aloft in the rigging, fear and awe, and extraordinarily nuanced performances by the entire cast, especially Douglas as a crafty sailmaker. More than a half-century later, the film works as a kaleidoscope: each time you twist it, you see something new. In a commentary carried over from the film's earlier DVD release, Stamp himself acknowledges **Billy Budd** as something you keep going back to. You may need to rewind to savor the irony of the contemporary apocalyptic ending. Warner Archive's fresh Blu-ray brings the proceedings into even clearer focus. Extras include the aforementioned commentary, shared with filmmaker Steven Soderbergh, where Stamp generously divulges acting secrets, his state of mind, and Ustinov's directorial tactics. 8

The Phantom's **I WAKE UP STREAMING! NOIR NUGGETS FROM THE 'NET**

FINGER MAN (1955)B&W 88/1/2

D: Harold Schuster. Frank Lovejoy, Forrest Tucker, Peggy Castle, Timothy Carey, John Cliff, Evelyn Eaton. 82 mins.

Born-to-be-noir-star Frank Lovejoy (this despite his contrapuntal surname) scores one of his best roles since **Try and Get Me!** (VS #99) as Casey Martin, a three-time loser offered an opportunity to trade his pending life sentence for freedom if he goes undercover to nail ruthless mob boss Dutch Becker (Tucker). Armed with a personal vendetta (Becker's heroin reduced his sister Lucille [Eaton] to hopeless junkie status), Casey takes the bait and gradually insinuates himself into Becker's inner circle, where, with more than a little help from Gladys Baker (Castle), golden-hearted refugee from Becker's hooker stable, he surreptitiously gathers evidence to end Dutch's evil reign. Lovejoy does an excellent job selling his life-hardened but selectively empathetic character, while Castle lends equal nuance to her role. Oft-unbridled character thesp Carey, the Nicolas Cage of his day, is at his wildest here as Dutch's hostile, frequently hysterical torpedo Louie Terpe, whose grating style and murderous ways prompt Casey to literally beat him into a coma using only his fists in a scene brutal enough to challenge Production Code limits. Another hard-core moment sees Dutch's thugs violently torture a hapless cop, while Casey's identification of a victim found in a very small trunk also registers as more than macabre. Director Schuster, whose other crime credits include the brilliant **Loophole** (Warner Archive) and creditable **Portland Expose** (VS #59), paints a stark, docu-style nocturnal picture that further delivers the noir goods.

MURDER BY CONTRACT (1958)B&W 88/1/2

D: Irving Lerner. Vince Edwards, Herschel Bernardi, Phillip Pine, Caprice Toriel, Michael Granger, Kathie Browne. 81 mins.

Lerner's excellent, offbeat low-budget noir casts Edwards as Claude, a self-made hitman who enjoys philosophizing even more than killing, which he's doing solely to save enough dough to purchase his dream house (!). Pine and Bernardi make for a memorable team as syndicate underlings assigned to chaperone Claude as he preps for a major

assassination, while Granger, of **Creature with the Atom Brain** fame, scores a neat bit as the mysterious Mr. Moon, in a clever early sequence. Unfortunately for all involved, Claude balks when he learns his target, Billie Williams (Toriel), is a woman, which he considers bad juju. Perry Botkin's **Third Man**-like score provides a neat contrapuntal note to the homicidal proceedings. **Murder by Contract** reps the best of several B crime movies—e.g., **City of Fear**, **The Scavengers**—toplining Edwards before he moved on to tube stardom as hirsute surgeon Ben Casey. Edwards also served as a reliable featured heavy in a number of recommended noirs, including Hugo Haas's **Hit and Run**, Stanley Kubrick's heist classic **The Killing**, Andrew Stone's hostage suspenser **The Night Holds Terror** and Roy Rowland's **Rogue Cop**.

THE PRETENDER (1947)B&W 88/1/2

D: W. Lee Wilder. Albert Dekker, Catherine Craig, Charles Drake, Alan Carney, Linda Stirling. 69 mins.

Billy Wilder's much-maligned younger brother W. Lee, mastermind behind infamous '50s clunkers like **The Man Without a Body**, demonstrates he could direct more than competent films when he had the proper talent in place. Noirs like **The Glass Alibi** (1946), **Once a Thief** (VS #106) and **The Pretender** can claim their honored spots among the best B crime movies of their era. Here, Wilder works with the king of noir camera artists John (T-Men) Alton, a taut script by Don (Shed No Tears) Martin, and a dynamic lead in Albert (Kiss Me Deadly) Dekker, who virtually carries the pic atop his sturdy shoulders and trademark toupee. Dekker plays Kenneth Holden, a shady financial advisor who's been dipping into the till of his chief client, socialite Claire Worthington (Craig, actor Robert Preston's real-life wife). Now that the bill's come due, a desperate Holden offers to marry Claire, who's already engaged to busy doctor Leonard Koster (Drake). When that arrangement goes south, Claire impulsively decides to elope with Holden: bad timing for our crooked suitor, who's just hired club owner/mobster Vincent Korrin (comic Carney in a rare menacing role) to put out a contract on Claire's then-unidentified betrothed, who now, natch, is none other than a panicked Holden himself. Clever complications abound as Holden looks to cancel the contract, ironic twists that elevate **The Pretender** above most films hinging on similar situations. Wilder peppers his secondary cast with familiar faces galore, include Tom Kennedy as earthy hitman Fingers Murdoch, Ben Welden as a rather dense bartender, and erstwhile serial starlet Stirling as a vengeful moll up on a murder rap. In a swiftly paced 69 minutes, Wilder and crew construct a densely plotted character-driven caper rich in nuance and suspense. Hopefully, W. Lee's noir trilogy will



gain greater exposure and respect for the under-appreciated auteur as time goes by (apologies to Bogie and Dooley).

STRANGE INTRUDER (1956)B&W 88/1/2

D: Irving Rapper. Edmond Purdom, Ida Lupino, Ann Harding, Carl Benton Reid, Gloria Talbott, Donald Murphy, Jacques Bergerac. 82 mins.

A fascinating sickie that ultimately pulls its punches, Rapper's psycho noir borrows a page or two from the previous year's Charles Laughton classic **Night of the Hunter** (VS #77) as unraveling Korean War vet Paul Quentin (an appropriately cipher-like Purdom) insinuates himself into the family of his late combat bud Dr. Adrian Carmichael (Murphy). At first, the creepy visitor is welcomed by the grieving clan, especially tykes Johnny (Eric Anderson) and Libby (Mimi Gibson)—until interior voices direct Paul to attempt to "send them to heaven" for a reunion with their dad. **Strange Intruder** tends to drag in spots, especially when widow Alice's (Lupino) bum ex-boyfriend Howard (Bergerac, who's even more awkward than Purdom here) shows up for a handout, but the shadowy scenes that see Paul surreptitiously threaten the unsuspecting kids are truly disturbing, creating a strong sense of unhealthy suspense. Those sequences and Ida's always dependable performance make **Strange Intruder** worth a look. 8

The Phantom's NOIR GANG

ALPHA VIDEO

(\$7.98 DVD) 6/18

GET OUTTA TOWN (1960) B&W 881/2

D: Charles Davis. Doug Wilson, Jeanne Baird, Marilyn O'Connor, Tony Louis, Frank Harding, Tommy Holden. 62 mins.

This ultra-obscure indie noir, populated mostly by marginal TV actors, boasts three major plusses: an excellent jazz score by frequent Stan Kenton associate Bill Holman, gritty location lensing by cinematographer Larry (T-Bird Gang) Raimond, and snappy wiseguy and smart-dame dialogue by scripter Bob Wehling (who'd go on to pen the notorious and notably snap-less Arch Hall Jr./Richard [Jaws] Kiel vehicle *Eegah!*). Unfortunately, Davis' revenge caper is undercut by meandering action, slack pacing and uneven thesping by many of the pic's secondary characters. Our story finds self-exiled ex-hood Kelly Olesen (Wilson) returning to his L.A. roots to learn the truth re his brother's violent, allegedly accidental demise. In the course of his amateur investigation, Kelly proves a singularly unpopular protagonist, threatened by cops, beaten by thugs, rejected by his former flame (Baird) and even booted by his own mother. Kelly's brief but sometimes sluggish odyssey eventually reunites him with a snaky ex-partner (Louis) who may hold the key to the mystery. Best here is the attractive Baird, the only cast member who went on to accumulate a lengthy resume, though Wilson and O'Connor (director Davis' wife), as a needling moll, are at least adequate in their roles. Diminutive Holden, cast as Kelly's eager would-be helper Squirrel, would later play your archetypal mischievous milquetoast in a pair of nudie-cuties, *Magic Spectacles* (1961) and 1964's *What's Up Front!* (the latter likewise penned by Wehling). While not quite the lost gem Alpha Video touts, *Get Outta Town* (re-released as *Gangster's Revenge*) surfaces as a curio noir buffs will want to scope out.

FOX CINEMA CLASSICS

(\$19.95 DVD)

THE BRASHER DOUBLOON (1947)

B&W 888

D: John Brahm. George Montgomery, Nancy Guild, Conrad Janis, Roy Roberts, Florence Bates, Marvin Miller. 72 mins.

Philip Marlowe goes slumming a mite in this scaled-down B noir that lacks the budget and star quality of earlier PM showcases like *Murder, My Sweet* and *The Big Sleep* (both 1944). Montgomery may not be in Bogie or Dick Powell's league but he makes for a likable incarnation of Raymond Chandler's

famous shamus, seen here in pursuit of the titular coin, purloined from unpleasant rich lady Mrs. Murdock's (Bates) vault, possibly with the assistance of her own spoiled young son Leslie (Janis). In the course of his investigation, Marlowe visits, among other sites, a Bunker Hill boarding-house ("This used to be a place of choice," our sleuth intones on the soundtrack. "Now it's for people who have no choice.") in L.A.'s atmospheric, long-vanished Angels Flight nabe. Not surprisingly, a trail of fresh corpses follows in our hero's wake as he encounters a succession of unsavory types, including an impressive Alfred Linder as a creepy Peter Lorre-styled lowlife, while also attempting to romance Mrs. Murdock's repressed secretary Merle (Guild). While well short of top shelf, *The Brasher Doubloon* packs enough story twists, witty wisecracks and breezy brutality to satisfy noir fans in search of a quick fix.

KINO LORBER FILMS

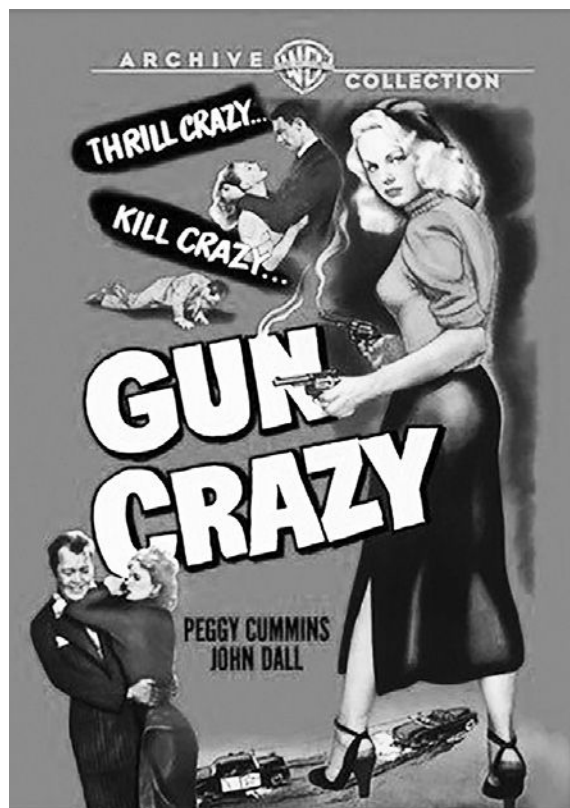
(\$29.95) 7/18

I WALK ALONE (1947) B&W

8881/2

D: Byron Haskin. Burt Lancaster, Elizabeth Scott, Kirk Douglas, Wendell Corey, Kristine Miller, George Rigaud. 97 mins.

The first of five Burt & Kirk screen team-ups, and arguably their most intense until the 1964 political thriller *Seven Days in May*, *I Walk Alone* casts the then-newcomers (Burt in his fifth feature film, Kirk in his fourth, billed below Wendell Corey no less) as former partners in crime who later find themselves at serious odds. Burt plays overly trusting Frankie Madison, who serves 14 years in stir after he's nabbed bootlegging liquor in 1933, Prohibition's final fling. Kirk's Noll Turner, meanwhile, makes out like a literal bandit, getting away with the crime and plowing the ill-gotten proceeds into a flourishing nightclub. When Frankie demands his belated piece of the action, he learns he's now up against a complex corporate set-up fronted by attorneys and accountants. Burt does a sterling job conveying the social confusion of a man who's spent his prime time behind bars, especially in his halting relationship with Noll's increasingly alienated squeeze Kay Lawrence (smoky-voiced Scott, a frequent femme fatale seen here in a sympathetic role) and his stubborn refusal to accept a world where gut loyalty has been usurped by cold greed. Drawn from Theodore Reeves' play, *I Walk Alone* devotes considerable time exploring the theme of changing ethics while still delivering the raw noir goods. In addition to the three leads, a trio of familiar movie mugs likewise score memorable roles—outsized Mike Mazurki as Noll's conflicted henchman, a typically serpentine Marc Lawrence as one of Frankie's former confederates, and



especially Mickey Knox as a sociopathic criminal climber ready to switch sides at the drop of a buck. In sum, *I Walk Alone* stands as one of noirdom's best. Extras on Kino's Blu-ray include an audio commentary by film historian Troy Howarth and a trailer gallery.

WARNER ARCHIVE

(\$21.99 each Blu-ray each) 6/18

GUN CRAZY (1950) B&W 8888

D: Joseph H. Lewis. Peggy Cummins, John Dall, Berry Kroeger, Morris Carnovsky, Annabel Shaw, Harry Lewis. 82 mins.

Screen anxiety specialist Dall, late of Hitchcock's *Rope*, as rod-obsessed Burt Tara, joins a peerless Cummins, as carnival sharpshooter Annie Laurie Starr, for a run-and-gun spree clearly inspired by Bonnie and Clyde's exploits. Lewis imparts an intimacy to the pair's doomed romance rarely seen onscreen, especially in the famous scene wherein Bart and Annie case a bank by car and you are there, right in the backseat, where you can hear their modulated voices and smell the cigarette smoke. The entire affair feels wrapped in a dreamlike fog made literal in the film's swamp-set finale. Warner Archive honors this one-of-a-kind classic with a sharp Blu-ray restoration further enhanced by film-noir scholar Glenn Erickson's audio commentary and the bonus nearly feature-length documentary *Film-Noir: Bringing Darkness to Light*. *Gun Crazy* would later put in a major cameo in Jim McBride's 1983 *Breathless* remake when fugitive lovers Richard Gere and Anna Kaprisky hide out behind the California Theater screen, where parallel scenes from the film can be heard and seen. One of the genre's legit giants.

KEY LARGO (1948) B&W 8888
D: John Huston. Humphrey Bogart, Edward G. Robinson, Lauren Bacall, Lionel Barrymore, Claire Trevor, Thomas Gomez. 105 mins.

A perfect storm of talent before and behind the camera hoists **Key Largo** not only to the top of the classic noir list but to the ranks of the greatest postwar American films. Director Huston reunites with his triumphant **Treasure of Sierra Madre** star Bogart while collaborating with writer Richard Brooks to adapt Maxwell Anderson's hit play to a screen awash in steamy atmosphere. As Frank McCloud, Bogie portrays the quintessential WW II vet, world- and war-weary but with his sorely tested moral code intact, a survivor who's determined to honor a promise sworn to a fallen comrade to visit the late soldier's family, widow Nora Temple (a peerless Bacall) and her feisty, wheelchair-bound father-in-law James (thespian legend Barrymore). Frank arrives unannounced to find the Temples' closed bar/hotel occupied by a group of uninvited guests, fleeing old-line gangster and hard-core sociopath Johnny Rocco (Robinson in a grand homage to the type of character that brought him to movie prominence), a gallery of hardened goons and memorable mugs headed by chief henchman Curly Hoff (Gomez), and moll Gaye Dawn (Trevor), a former chanteuse brought low and expendable by age and booze. Tensions and tempers mount as Rocco grows dangerously restless waiting for his Cuban boat connection, an emotion intensified by the roar of the steadily strengthening winds signaling the impending arrival of a monster hurricane that's due to hit the remote Florida isle. A tragic subplot involving Native American brothers John (Rodd Redwing) and Tom (future Tonto Jay Silverheels) Osceola, fugitives from a misdemeanor rap, exposes the area's entrenched racism. While the film shares elements with Bogie's star-making vehicle **The Petrified Forest** (1936), drawn from Robert E. Sherwood's play, and Hemingway's similarly seaside-set **To Have and Have Not** (1944)—relaunched just a half-dozen years later as **The Breaking Point**, with John Garfield in the reluctant hero role—**Key Largo** reflects a rarified celluloid alchemy that reps Warner Bros at its zenith, one further enhanced by Warner Archive's crisp Blu-ray. 8

Get'em While They Last!

Order your **VideoScope** back issues today!
See page 54 for details

The Phantom's JOY OF SETS

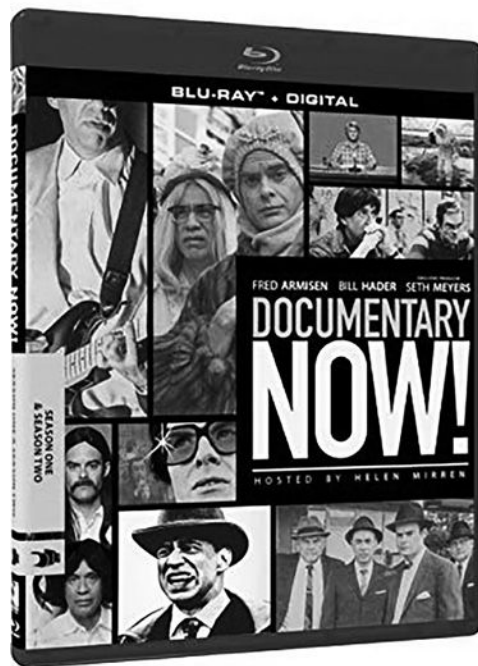
TELE-VIDEO

MOCK DOCS A GO-GO!

A terrifically sharp satirical series that flew largely under the radar during its 2015 cable TV run, **Documentary Now! Seasons 1 & 2** is now available on Blu-ray and DVD via Mill Creek Entertainment's two-disc set (\$29.95). Employing a deceptively straight-faced intro hosted by a solemn Helen Mirren, the show sent up a wide range of popular doc genres, all featuring the versatile comic skills of Fred Armisen & Bill Hader, who form a flawless onscreen team, with help from fellow longtime SNL regular Seth Myers. Best here is **Sandy Passage**, a spot-on take-off of the Maysles Brothers' **Grey Gardens**, with our stars in creative drag, that cleverly veers into **Blair Witch** territory. Other segments skewer the confidently clueless hipsters at **VICE**, **Rashomon**-like true crime stories, and portentous rock band bios, among other worthy targets. **Documentary Now!** rates as a show deserving of a cable comeback.

ACORN CRIME TIME

Acorn Media introduces the latest installment in a popular series with **Murdoch Mysteries Season 11** (\$59.99 4-disc Blu-ray, \$49.99 5-disc DVD), based on the novels by Maureen Jennings. Set in Edwardian Toronto, the show stars Yanick Bosso as Detective William Murdoch and features Jonny Harris, Daniel Maslany and Thomas Craig in 18 new episodes. Extras include **Making Murdoch** featurettes. Acorn



likewise issues **No Offence Series 1** (3-disc \$49.99), writer Paul Abbott's irreverent police procedural dramedy set in Manchester and starring Joanna Scanlan, Elaine Cassidy, Alexandra Roach and Will Mellor; extras include cast and crew interviews, along with deleted scenes.

RISE OF FALLS

In animated developments, Shout! Factory supplies a bonanza for **Gravity Falls** fans with its **Gravity Falls: The Complete Series** (7-disc, \$99.99 Blu-ray, \$69.99 DVD), assembling all 40 episodes of the popular Disney show chronicling the forest-set adventures of 12-year-old twins Dipper and Mabel Pines. The gala box set arrives with a plethora of special features, including **One Crazy Summer**, a look back with cast and crew, audio commentaries on all episodes, **The Hirsch Twins**, wherein Alex & Ariel Hirsch reminisce about their own summers growing up, a **Between the Pines** behind-the-scenes special, deleted scenes, shorts, promos and more.

MORE MSTIE MADNESS

Shout! likewise keeps the **MSTie** Madness coming with **Mystery Science Theater 3000: Volume VIII**, offering four fresh digital turkeys to help celebrate the Thanksgiving Season: the '80s amateur-night atrocity **Hobgoblins**, 1961's cost-conscious interplanetary travel tale **The Phantom Planet**, starring Dean Fredericks, the H.G. Lewis-completed 1965 head-scratcher **Monster a Go Go**, and the 1957 obscurity **The Dead Talk Back**. Bonus material will be announced closer to the set's release date (shoutfactory.com).

WHEN THE SCREEN SCREAMS
YOU'LL SCREAM TOO...
IF YOU VALUE YOUR LIFE!



FILM FINDS

CASTLE KEEPERS

Shout! Factory brings a brace of classic William Castle gimmick flicks to Blu-ray. The bizarre 1959 **The Tingler**, featuring rampaging spinal lobsters, paranoid LSD trips, and lots and lots of screaming, arrives packed with bonus material, including film historian Steve Haberman's audio commentary, **I Survived the Tingler**, an interview with ingenue Pamela Lincoln, **Unleashing Percepto!**, an interview with publicist Barry Lorie, the vintage featurette **Scream for Your Lives!: William Castle and The Tingler**, plus the original "scream" scene, trailer and more. An axe-swinging Joan Crawford takes center stage in 1964's **Strait-Jacket**, equipped with an audio commentary shared by Steve Haberman, genre author/scenarist David J. Schow, and Constantine Nasr, the new featurettes **Joan Crawford Got Me Fired**, with actress Anne Helm, and **On the Road with Joan Crawford**, an interview with publicist Richard Kahn, along with the vintage short **Battle-Ax: The Making of Strait-Jacket**, costume, makeup and screen tests, trailer and more. The Blu-rays are tagged at \$29.99 each.

Mill Creek Entertainment likewise proffers **Strait-Jacket**, sharing a *Psycho Biddy Double Feature* with Joan's sinister 1967 circus romp **Berserk!** The double-bill disc lists for \$14.98.

CULT CRITERION

Criterion Collection extends the deluxe Blu-ray treatment to a pair of cult classics. Brian De Palma's crossover hit **Sisters** (1973) stars the late Margot Kidder in dual roles in a semi-satiric Hitchcockian thriller that features creative use of multi-screen techniques; the disc arrives in a fresh 4k digital restoration edition brimming with bonus material, including a new interview with costar Jennifer Salt, a 1970 appearance by Kidder on **The Dick Cavett Show**, an archival 1973 audio discussion with auteur De Palma, photo gallery, radio spots, booklet and more. The 1965 wilderness adventure **The Naked Prey**, directed by and starring Cornel Wilde, receives an HD digital upgrade in a Blu-ray complemented by an audio commentary by film scholar Stephen Prince, along with original soundtrack cues, a 1970 Wilde interview, and an essay by film critic Michael Atkinson. The discs list for \$39.95 each.

MONDO KINO

Kino Lorber digs deep into the TV vault to debut a quartet of cult titles on Blu-ray, starting with our cover girl Karen Black's 1975 showcase **Trilogy of Terror**. Also joining the Blu-ray ranks are John Llewellyn Moxey's **The Night Stalker** (1972) and follow-up **The Night Strangler** (1973), directed by Dan (Dark Shadows) Curtis, two imaginative tele-movies starring Darren McGavin as Vegas-based reporter/monster hunter Carl Kolchak. Both special editions arrive with audio commentaries, new interviews, featurettes, and more. Kino likewise rescues Joseph (The Outer Limits) Stefano's horror rarity **Ghost of Sierra de Cobre**, starring Martin Landau, Diane Baker and Judith Anderson, a 1964 feature-length series pilot, reportedly deemed too scary for TV at the time, that enjoyed only a few airings.

[REC] REDUX

Shout! Factory combines all four installments in the harrowing Spanish found footage fear-film franchise [REC] in a fresh four-disc Blu-ray set, kicking off with Jauma Balaguero and Paco Plaza's original [REC] and continuing through a trio of sequels—[REC] 2, [REC] 3: **Genesis** and [REC] 4: **Apocalypse**. Copious extras include a filmmakers commentary on the original, behind-the-scenes featurettes, cast and crew interviews, deleted/extended scenes, trailers and more. The set is priced at \$59.97. ⚡

The Phantom's VINTAGE MYSTERY!

WHISPERING FOOTSTEPS (1943) B&W

8881/2

D: Howard Bertherton. John Hubbard, Rita Quigley, Joan Blair, Charles Halton, Cy Kendall, Juanita Quigley, Billy Benedict. 54 mins.

A savvy study in small-town tribalism masquerading as a murder mystery, this obscure Republic second feature casts Hubbard as Marcus Aurelius (Mark) Borne, a bank teller who returns from an Indianapolis vacation to find himself a suspect in a series of statewide murders. A reported physical resemblance to the wanted man is enough to make Mark the target of local gossip, fear, and fascination, as well as the put-upon prey of Detective Brad Dolan (Kendall), who haunts our hero's every move. Among Mark's tormentors are several formerly friendly fellow boardinghouse residents: milkman Jerry Murphy (Benedict), moonlighting from his East Side Kid chores) and his scream-happy sister Rose (Juanita Quigley), a supremely irritating 'tweener who at one point receives a sudden, now politically incorrect face-slap from her fed-up mom, otherwise kindly proprietor Ma Murphy (Mary Gordon). Other suspicious parties include nosy meter reader Cy (Matt McHugh) and flirtatious spinster librarian Sally (Marie Blake), along with Mark's lecherous would-be ladies man boss Mr. Hammond (Halton). Meanwhile, sophisticated self-exile Helene LaSalle (Blair) reluctantly returns to town—where her quietly sardonic 'tude irks townsfolk even further—and briefly gets involved with Mark. Helene represents an unusually independent female character for the time and place, the invention of story writer and co-scripter (with Dane Lussier) Gertrude Walker, whose other noir contributions include story credits for the Joan Crawford vehicle **The Damned Don't Cry** (Warner Archive) and the Anthony Mann classic **Railroaded!** (VS #21). **Whispering Footsteps** introduces another smart femme in Brook Hammond (Juanita's older sister Rita Quigley), a sharp coed who's nurtured a longtime crush on the much older Mark. Noir touches include a very effective scene, reminiscent of Jane Randolph's paranoid pursuit in the Val Lewton classic **Cat People**, where Brook is menaced by a shadowy figure in a deserted nocturnal park. The trim tale reaches a satisfying conclusion with a neatly lensed twist fadeout that feels ahead of its time. Withal, these **Footsteps** are well worth a careful look and listen. Lead Hubbard, meantime, would gain greater notoriety for western fans as the craven, cowardly Willard Mims in Budd Boetticher's 1957 Randolph Scott gem **The Tall T**. For more surefooted mysteries, scope out **Step by Step** (1945), starring screen tough guy Lawrence Tierney in a rare jaunty hero role, and the 1949 William Powell vehicle **Take One False Step**, featuring a supremely clever opening montage. ⚡

JOHN AMPLAS: MONDO ROMERO! *As Told To Don Vaughan*

Over the course of his lengthy career, George Romero established a repertoire of actors and technical crew who worked with him from project to project. Actor John Amplas was a seminal member of that troupe, serving in various capacities on six Romero films, including **Martin**, in which he starred as the eponymous wannabe vampire. As a result, Amplas came to know Romero well as a filmmaker, friend and confidante. **VideoScope** recently spoke with the actor about his long association with Romero, how he made the role of Martin his own, horror stories from the making of **Day of the Dead**, and much, much more.—DV

DON VAUGHAN Did you know George Romero before you were cast in the lead of **Martin**?

JOHN AMPLAS No, I did not know George prior to **Martin**. I knew of George since he had been working in Pittsburgh and I'm a Pittsburgh native and I certainly knew his work from **Night of the Living Dead**. That was a big deal for us Pittsburgh types. I first met him when he came to a production that I was in during my last year of college. I was an older student—23 when I started college. In 1976, my senior year, George came to a production I was doing at the Pittsburgh Playhouse. For whatever reason, he talked to me afterwards. He liked what I was doing, the work that he saw, and told me about a script he was working on. He said that I had given him an idea. He had a character in mind, but the character was older. Seeing my work, he went away and readjusted his thinking and came back with a script a couple of months later and offered me the role.

DV How old were you when **Martin** was made?

JA I was 27. I know, I looked a lot younger.

DV **Martin** was your first motion picture?

JA It wasn't my first motion picture, it was my first commercial feature. I had done some things for PBS and some industrial work, things of that nature. It was my first lead in a feature.

DV What do you recall of the making of **Martin**? Was it a positive experience for you?

JA Oh, absolutely! When I started working with George, he started developing a kind of repertoire company of people he could work with again and again. I ended up doing six movies with George. The crew that worked on **Martin** was the same crew that worked with him on the last movie I was involved with, **The Dark Half**, with Timothy Hutton. I played Timothy's acting partner. He plays two roles—his good self and his evil self. So whenever he was on camera working with one or the other, I would play the alter ego off camera so he had someone to do lines with. But anyway, what George developed was a family of people that he was able to work with again and again, which became this group of people that stuck with him through all of his Pittsburgh years, starting with Tom Savini. We really had a family atmosphere. The great thing about George was his sense of humor, and everybody on set had their own senses of humor. That kept us alive and going. That was really the trick that kept things working well. In my mind, George was best when he wrote and directed the script and edited the film. He was a fantastic editor. Those three things, I think, are key in his work in all of his films.

DV Was George a hands-on director or did he give you a lot of freedom to create the character as you saw fit?

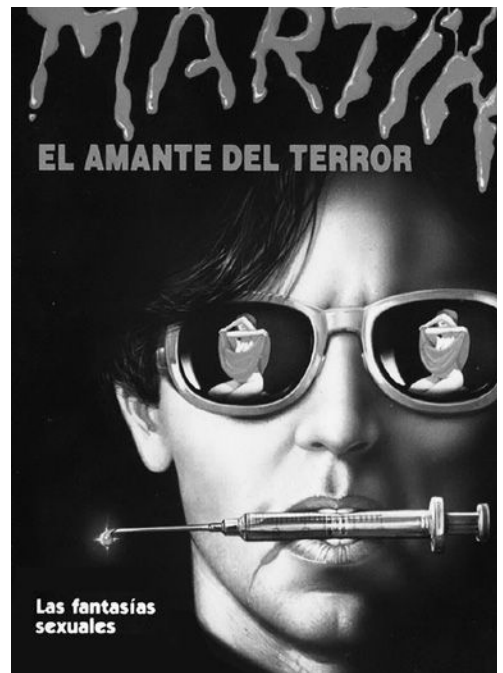
JA He left actors alone. He was smart enough to know that we understood what our job was, which was to play this character. So, no, he was not hands-on in that regard. If there was an adjustment to be made, then, yeah, he would talk to you. But for the most part, he left you alone to do what he hired you to do, which was greatly appreciated by everyone who worked with him.

DV How did you view the character of Martin going in? How did you make him your own?

JA As an actor, there are no tricks, really. What I try to do always is figure out what's on the page. And I play it moment to moment. You read the script, you make certain decisions, but the work really has to happen in present time. Fortunately, in making movies, you have a little more time when you're shooting, so you're not having to play the character from beginning through the middle to the end on a daily basis. You're able to find and get a little more subtlety and play things more moment to moment. And that's what I did. George wrote a tremendous script and created a character that was interesting and complicated. I just took what I saw from the text and turned that into physical action.

DV George plays a priest in **Martin**. Tell us about his big scene.

JA Well, there you go. There's another talent—George as an actor! I wasn't surprised that he was so good in that scene. It was delightful to watch and he was terrific in it. He could hold his own with any actor around. And his sense of humor is what made that particular scene what it



was. That's who George is. That's kind of representative of his personality in a lot of ways.

DV How did **Martin** impact your acting career moving forward?

JA Not very much at all.

DV You have an uncredited role in **Dawn of the Dead**, which was released the same year as **Martin**. What do you recall of the production?

JA I was asked again if I wanted to work on the film. I had already moved to New York. Christine Forrest, who became George's wife, worked at a restaurant in New York, Lady Astor's, which was across the street from the Shakespeare Festival's public theater on Lafayette Street. So she was able to get a lot of us actor types jobs there. And a lot of the actors who were waiting tables or doing something at the restaurant got work through Christine in a lot of George's films. Scott Reiniger was working there as a waiter and David Emge was cooking at the time. So there were a lot of people right from that relationship. George was very loyal to the people he had met along the way and the actors he had worked with. So we had an opportunity to work on **Dawn of the Dead**. I actually got involved because of a lot of the people that I knew as a casting director. So I was able to get [David] Emge his job. Also, we cast a lot of zombies. So that's really what I was doing on **Dawn of the Dead**. I had a very small role, which was by total accident. We were shooting the scene at the beginning of the movie where the SWAT team is after these Puerto Rican gang members, and they needed an actor on the roof. I don't think the role was written, but they needed someone up there to get shot. So Savini grabbed me and put me in this very un-PC Puerto Rican makeup and attire and up on the roof I went. That's how that happened. They just needed a body.

“So Savini grabbed me and put me in this very un-PC Puerto Rican makeup and attire and up on the roof I went.”

**John Amplas on
*Dawn of the Dead***

DV Were you on set for the entire shoot?

JA I was there for all of it. And that’s one of the great things about working on a Romero set—everybody pitches in. We all are there to help make everything work. And plus it was a lot of fun.

DV What did you think of *Dawn of the Dead* when it was released?

JA I thought it was a great big comic book, which I think it was supposed to be. Of course, there was some social commentary there. But I thought it was terrific and I really enjoyed it.

DV Before you met George, were you a fan of the kinds of horror movies that he is best known for?

JA No, not at all. I grew up in the ‘50s and ‘60s, so I was one of these Saturday matinee kids with 17 cartoons, a horror movie and an Abbott and Costello. I saw a lot of B movies during that time, Roger Corman stuff and things of that nature. But I never followed the genre as a fan, to be quite honest. I was a little more serious in terms of what I wanted

to do. I knew I wanted to be an actor at a very young age—I started when I was 10 years old, working in community theater. I did theater my entire life, so that’s the kind of actor I was. And even during the time I was shooting films with George, I was still doing plays. I just retired from the Pittsburgh Playhouse and that was my training ground as well. I started there in 1972 as a student and then in 1982 I was offered a teaching job. I taught acting and directing, and acted and directed on the Playhouse stage my entire life, up until recently. So I’m really a theater guy.

DV As an actor, do you prefer theater over film?

JA I think I would prefer doing films at this point in my life. Stage is very hard. It’s a commitment unlike any other because you have to rehearse the play, you have learn it and understand it, and then you have to perform it from beginning to end eight performances a week. That’s a hard job. That’s a grind and can be very difficult. Today, I would much rather do a movie than get on stage. I love to direct and hopefully I will always get opportunities to direct plays, which is really now more my passion than acting. Acting is a hard business, and it’s a hard craft because it really takes a lot out of you. What you see over two hours on stage really takes eight hours of energy.

DV *Knightriders* was a really different kind of movie for George Romero. Tell us what you remember about its production.

JA I was offered one of two roles in *Knightriders*. There was the role I chose to play, and there was the other jester that Randy Kovitz played, who fell in love with the emcee of the traveling troupe. I chose the mime simply because I thought the role would be more interesting and mysterious. It was a great job because it was like ten weeks of summer vacation and all I had to do was play, for the most part. The film itself I thought was really interesting. George has done several films that are outside the horror genre. In fact, I think he wanted to make more of them, but in this business you get pigeonholed. If something is a success, the money people want



John Amplas gets gang member makeover in *Dawn of the Dead*.

you to stay in that genre because they want to feed off that success. I wouldn’t even consider *Martin* a horror film; I would consider it more a psychological thriller, more of a character study like *Henry: Portrait of a Serial Killer*. Unfortunately, George got pigeonholed into this kind of horror and what is now known as the zombie film. The interesting thing about that is, George never called them zombies. Zombies are a whole different category, it’s like voodoo. George called them living dead.

DV Do you have any interesting stories from making *Knightriders*?

JA I think it was Ed Harris’ second film and his first lead in a feature. He, too, did a lot of theater prior to going into movies. That had been the way in for a long time, that you would go from theater into movies. A lot of actors who just do film don’t have the same kind of understanding of craft and technique in terms of how to do the work. Anyway, *Knightriders* was ten weeks of summer vacation. The stars of this movie were really the stunt guys. They were amazing. And the story was interesting. It was about knights on motorcycles, but it was also about the death of chivalry and was very King Arthur-like. It had a great message, I believe. And it, too, is one of those movies that George made that doesn’t get the same kind of attention that his *Dead* movies get. The same is true of *Martin*. But the people who see these movies love them. I get a ton of fans, but I get more attention generally for things like *Creepshow* and *Day of the Dead* than I do for *Martin* or *Knightriders*.

DV You’re in *Creepshow* as Nathan’s corpse in the Father’s Day segment. You appear in full zombie makeup by Tom Savini. Tell us about the process of making you up. How long did it take and what did it involve?



Mime John goes the greasepaint route in *Knightriders*.

“The only thing that I wouldn’t do was the 30-second scene of Nathan with maggots in his mouth.”

John Amplas on *Creepshow*

JA I had to sit under a week’s worth of plaster and measurements and the like. Tom spent a good month working on what became the mask that was completely useable because the jaw piece was set right at chin level whereby I could move the jaw up and down. The hands and arms were gloves. One of the reasons I was cast is that Tom needed someone who was slight. At the time, I hadn’t gained a lot of weight yet. I wasn’t the big fat guy I became! So he called me and said, “We need someone to play this corpse.” I said, “Okay, I’ll come in and do it.” It was a week’s work for me, then he worked on it for a month, then we came back and shot it. I shot my scenes in about a week.

DV What was the most challenging aspect of playing Nathan?

JA I didn’t find it that challenging. The only thing that I wouldn’t do was the 30-second scene of Nathan with maggots in his mouth. Otherwise, it was not that challenging, it was a pretty easy role. The costume went on like a suit. I was obviously in a pit when Nathan comes out of the grave, so there was a fan down there that kept me cool. That may have been the hardest part, the closed-in sense of it. But once camera was rolling, it was not a big deal. And the people I had the opportunity to work with were terrific. I can’t say enough about Viveca Lindfors as a person and as a professional. She was just a doll. I actually was in another play that I think her husband adapted from Bertolt Brecht called **Brecht on Brecht**, which was an adaptation of a lot of Brecht’s writing. So I had that



John Amplas sans makeup in recent snap.

connection with her as well. And Carrie Nye is exactly as you see her on screen—chain-smoking, sarcastic and funny as hell. I got the chance to work with Carrie again on stage. I stage managed a production of **Without Apologies** in Pittsburgh that she starred in. Here’s the deal: Everyone I had the opportunity to work with during the years I worked with George all became friends. And we’re still friends. **Martin** was shot 42 years ago and I still keep in touch with most of the people who were involved. Those are the kinds of relationships that were built because George brought us together all those years ago and because we have an affection and an affinity for him and his worth ethic. And we all still enjoy each other’s company. I think it’s a real testament to the man himself. I cannot remember there ever being any kind of major crisis that was met with anything but a calm “Let’s figure it out.”

DV Did you voice Nathan’s corpse in *Creepshow*?

JA No, I didn’t. That was John Warmore. However, it was my voice in the very last sequence, where Nathan is walking away into the mist.

DV You had a significant role as Dr. Fisher in *Day of the Dead*. How did you get that?

JA I really don’t know. I was lucky in the fact that I would get a phone call asking, “Would you do this?” And my answer was always, “Yes, of course!” The whys and wherefores I never questioned. Had George asked me to do anything, I’d be there. And when I got the job, I just went and did my job, which is how I think it should be done. I’m really simplistic in that regard. An actor has to know what he or she is there to do, and I’ve always understood that. You prepare, you get there on set, and you do it. I enjoyed working on **Day of the Dead**. I enjoyed being the voice of reason in the film, although it wasn’t heard! It was good being a good guy. I never got a chance to be a real bad guy, though as sympathetic as a lot of people feel for Martin, he was a serial killer.

DV In *Day of the Dead*, I understand that the humidity in the mine shaft that served as a major set caused a lot of problems.

JA Well, there were a lot of respiratory problems because of the damp and cold in the mines. They are still in existence but are more cleaned up now. They were used for storage, but at the time they were still pretty rough. There were some places in that mine that were so dark you had to have a flashlight in order to see. There was actually a pond back in the deep, dark interior that was a couple of feet deep. If you weren’t careful, you could get pretty wet. The place was scary. It was also used as a mushroom farm. There were people who really suffered, because we were down there for three or four months, working as much as six days a week. It was a little tricky for a lot of folks. I didn’t have that issue because I



John as unheeded scientist in **Day of the Dead**.

worked only two weeks, but people were getting sick all over the place. Tom Savini used cow guts or sheep guts or something that they had purchased for the zombies and especially for Joe Pilato’s scene where they pull him apart. They had stored them in a refrigerator and went away for a weekend, and when they came back, they found that the electricity had gone off. They were ready to shoot this scene with Pilato, and the guts had started to rot. I wasn’t there, but I heard it was pretty bad. And Joe, unfortunately, had to kind of sit under this stuff for hours as it was stinking the place up.

DV Of all of the George Romero films in which you’ve appeared, what is your favorite?

JA My favorite is **Martin**, which I think is his best movie. And not just because I’m in it. I think it’s the most honest and the most artful of his films. And I think it says the most about what was going on at the time. I also believe it stands up to contemporary times. George also said it was his favorite as well.

DV What are your fondest memories of George as a friend and as a filmmaker?

JA Well, I think it is those times when I first met him and was working on **Martin**, getting to know him and how he worked. Finding a friend I was able to have for more than 40 years, someone I could always count on and talk to if I needed to. He was a guy of great sensibility and humor and compassion for others. I think that’s the legacy that I believe George has left many of us. It’s his ongoing friendship and his appreciation of others. He really cared about people and that matters a lot. In a business where relationships are often short term, this was a lifelong friendship. So I’m really grateful for having had him as a mentor, initially, and as a friend for the duration. ☿

VIDEOSCOPE TRIBUTE

DEBRA HILL: QUEEN OF HALLOWEEN!

By Rob Freese

2018 marks the 40th anniversary of John Carpenter's blockbuster original and the release of David Gordon Green's latest iteration of the horror classic. To mark the occasion, *'Scope* scribe Rob Freese honors producer Debra Hill, whose vital role in the film's creation too often goes ignored.

Born in Haddonfield, New Jersey, in 1950, Debra Hill grew up in Philadelphia and began pursuing a career in motion pictures in the mid-'70s. She is considered a pioneer for her willingness to take technical positions on film crews traditionally filled by men, working as a script supervisor, assistant director and second-unit director. One of her earliest script supervisor jobs was for Larry Buchanan's Marilyn Monroe biopic *Goodbye, Norma Jean* (1976). She met John Carpenter when she was hired on the crew of *Assault on Precinct 13* (1976), where she also performed assistant editor duties. Other credits during this period include Greydon Clark's *Satan's Cheerleaders* (1977) and *Hi-Riders* (1978), Don Edmonds' *Bare Knuckles*, and Jim McCullough Sr.'s *Charge of the Model T's* (both 1977). Working with these filmmakers gave Hill a crash course in how to efficiently produce low-budget features with limited crews and resources. In the documentary *The Wild World of Ted V. Mikels*, Mikels recalls meeting Hill while filming a feature in Utah and talks of her fierce determination to learn and work in the film business.

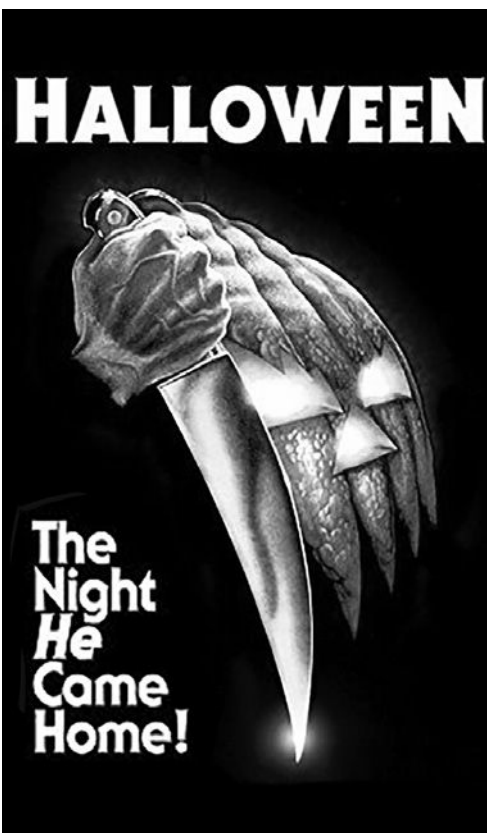
Carpenter contacted Hill sometime after *Assault on Precinct 13* and they began dating. Around this time, producer Irwin Yablans offered them the opportunity to write, produce and direct a low-budget horror feature. It sported the uninspiring title *The Babysitter Murders*. While most of the credit for the success of what eventually became *Halloween* (1978) will always go to Carpenter, it is worth noting that Hill's production experience allowed Carpenter full freedom to create the film as he envisioned it. Where most production crews are put together with resumes, sample reels and recommendations, Hill was able to hand-pick the best young artists, including cinematographer Dean Cundey, with whom she'd already worked, a huge advantage even before the first set-up was shot. Carpenter has never shied away from praising the importance of Hill's participation in making *Halloween* the

trendsetting success it became. Although her personal relationship with Carpenter eventually ended, their professional partnership continued over a series of films that includes *The Fog* (1980), *Escape from New York* (1981), *Halloween II* (1981), and *Halloween III: Season of the Witch* (1982).

In 1983 Hill produced David Cronenberg's *The Dead Zone*. Many fans still consider it one of the most faithful, suspenseful and emotionally driven adaptations of Stephen King's work. It was a departure from the kind of projects both producer and director were known for at the time. It also ushered Hill into the studio system. Next was the John Landis-directed *Clue* (1985), based on the Parker Brothers board game, a fun screwball murder mystery that helped Hill break out of the horror genre. In 1986 she formed Hill/Obst Productions with her producing partner Lynda Obst. They took a chance on novice director Chris Columbus and produced *Adventures in Babysitting* (1987). In 1990 Hill made her directorial debut on the small screen with *Far Below*, an episode of the horror anthology *Monsters*. After producing the Oscar-winning *The Fisher King* (1991), Hill moved on to Christopher Guest's comic *Attack of the 50 Ft. Woman* remake (1993) for HBO. In 1994, with Lou Arkoff, Hill produced Showtime's *Rebel Highway* series, remakes of AIP juvenile delinquent movies. Hill not only co-produced the 10 feature-length films but also wrote two of them, *Jailbreakers* and *Confessions of a Sorority Girl*. The idea was to remake these classic drive-in films with small crews, short schedules and low budgets. The series combined veteran directors with new filmmakers and casts composed of seasoned pros and newbies. Directors included Alan Arkush, Ralph Bakshi, Joe Dante, Uli Edel, William Friedkin, Jonathan Kaplan, Mary Lambert, John McNaughton, John Milius and Robert Rodriguez.

In 1996 Hill, Carpenter and star Kurt Russell brought Snake Plissken back to big screens in *Escape from L.A.*, a fun comic-book style action adventure story. While the film didn't jumpstart a new franchise, the trio did form the company Snakeworld, eventually continuing Snake's exploits in a comic book series. In 2001 the *Hollywood Reporter* announced Hill would make her directorial feature debut with *Tales Not Told*, described as "sexy and scary," that would have been the first release for New Line's proposed Chickflicks division. The project was mentioned again in *Variety* in 2003 but never materialized.

After 9/11, Hill made an effort to ensure her productions were filmed in America, bringing more jobs to the men and women who worked in the U.S. movie industry. Women in Film honored her in 2003 with the Crystal Award. Upon receiving it, Hill commented, "I hope someday there won't be a need for Women in Film. That it will be People in Film. That it will be equal pay, equal rights and equal job opportunities for eve-



rybody." Her career came full circle when Hill teamed with Carpenter to produce the remake of their hit *The Fog* (2005). Having been diagnosed with cancer in early 2004, she would not live to see the film's premiere, but it did carry the dedication, "In loving memory Debra Hill." She had been working on the Oliver Stone feature *World Trade Center* (2006) at the time of her death.

In a career that spanned over four decades, Debra Hill succeeded in rising from script supervisor to one of the most influential and powerful female producers in Hollywood, paving the way for others to follow. The Producers Guild of America (PGA) honored Hill by forming the Debra Hill Fellowship to extend her legacy. The fellowship's mission statement declares it was "established to provide significant financial support to a promising producer as she or he embarks on their career 'to change the world.'"

I never had the opportunity to meet Debra Hill, but I feel like I got to know her through her films. She was obviously a rebel who never settled. I knew any movie I came across that had her name on it would be worth a watch. I think it is safe to say that without Debra Hill, not only *Halloween* but the entire slasher-film craze it helped usher in probably never would have happened. *Halloween* could have just been *The Babysitter Murders*, another forgettable drive-in horror movie, here this weekend and gone the next. Like Michael Myers, the character she helped create (and even portrayed on screen—she stood in as young Michael, grabbing the knife that would slay Judith Myers), Debra Hill's legacy seems to have no end. ☞

BEST OF THE FESTS! FANTASIA 2018 FILM FESTIVAL

By Joseph Perry

Fantasia 2018 continued the festival's tradition of hosting Canada's finest lineup of horror, science fiction, and genre fare, drawing filmmakers, actors, industry insiders, and cinema fans to Montreal from July 12–August 2 for a program showcasing more than 125 features and 220 short films from around the world.

The Indonesian offering **Satan's Slaves** is a remake of that country's 1982 **Satan's Slave**, set in the same time period. Once-popular pop singer Marwani (Ayu Laksmi) passes away after falling ill. Her teenage daughter Rin (Tara Basro) watches over her three younger brothers, as her father is often out running errands or looking for work. Ghostly occurrences involving Marwani take place, including the mysterious death of the children's grandmother. Much of the activity revolves around the youngest boy, Ian (M. Adhiyat, outstanding in his role), who also happens to be deaf. A local cleric (Arswendi Bening Swara) and his son (Dimas Aditya) attempt to help out Rin and her siblings, and the protagonists uncover an occult conspiracy directly involving Marwani and her family. Writer/director Joko Anwar (**Ritual** [VS #88]) keeps things lean, suspenseful and intriguing. The brooding atmosphere is terrific, and the Muslim takes on supernatural horror offer an engaging alternative to the Christian- and Catholic-based outings with which Western audiences are more familiar.

Satan's Slaves also shares several interesting parallels with this year's **Hereditary** (Lionsgate, 9/18). Connoisseurs of Asian fright films are likely to find this one of the genre's strongest offerings in recent memory.

French filmmaker Xavier Gens trades in the extremes of his earlier **Frontière(s)** (2007) and **The Divide** (VS #83) for a sweeping Lovecraft-meets-Melville vibe in the Spanish–French co-production **Cold Skin**. In 1914, a weather official (David Oakes) sails to a distant island near the Antarctic to chart the wind currents. The man he is sent to replace has gone missing, leaving behind bizarre drawings of creepy creatures. The island's only other human resident is lighthouse keeper Gruner (Ray Stevenson), a gruff misanthrope who keeps a human-like female amphibian creature (Aura Garrido) as a combination pet and sex slave. Others of her species launch nightly attacks on the lighthouse, and the two men find themselves further at odds as they debate the creatures' intelligence. Gruner wants to destroy them all, while the weather official feels they are sentient beings that should be spared. Though the film occasionally feels bloated and ambitious beyond its means, it provides plenty to chew on philosophically and delivers in its action-packed battle sequences as well. Garrido is wonderful as the mer-woman, giving her character a humanity reminiscent of Doug Jones' character in **The Shape of Water** (that isn't the only similarity the two films share). Daniel Aranyó's cinematography is gorgeous, bringing to life the harsh climes of the two men's unwelcoming world. **Cold Skin** is a thinking person's creature feature that is well worth a look.

Writer/director Lisa Brühlmann's Swiss body-horror offering **Blue My Mind** is a fascinating coming-of-age tale centering on 15-year-old Mia (Luna Wedler), who has just moved to a new school and is looking to fall in with a popular but troublemaking group of students headed up by the charismatic Gianna (Zoë Pastelle Holthuizen). The more Mia is accepted into the fold, the more unusual, disturbing changes happen to her body, including webbing that forms between her toes. She begins to doubt that her parents are her biological progenitors, and her behavior grows increasingly erratic, from quaffing salt water to devouring her mother's pet fish. This dark fantasy is a fine addition to the subgenre of female adolescence body horror, with Brühlmann serving up a truly touching story. Wedler is superb in her evocation of a young woman struggling to find her place in the world while watching monstrous changes occur to her physical being.

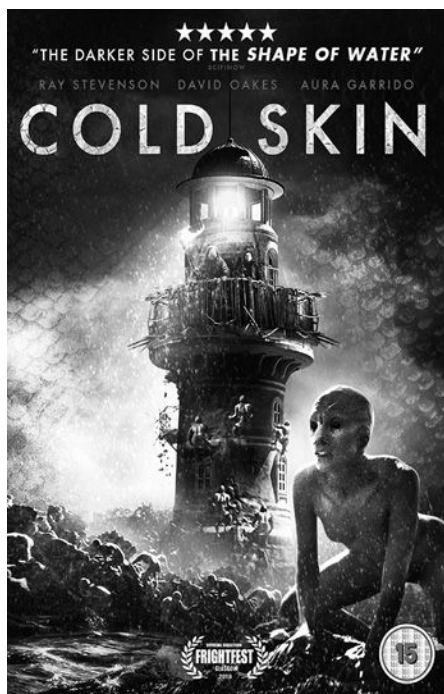
The Man Who Killed Hitler and Then the Bigfoot conjures up a hefty image of action and potential genre zaniness, but writer/helmer Robert D. Kryzkowski has loftier goals in mind



Amphibian creature surfaces in scene from **Cold Skin**.

with his directorial debut. Sam Elliott toplines as Calvin Barr, the titular assassin tagged by differing arms of the American government to carry out seemingly impossible deeds decades apart from each other. Rather than basking in the glory of his legendary first kill, Barr ruminates on how killing a man does not stop the evil that's set in motion. Now in his twilight years, he is still saddened by the loss of a woman he loved long ago and feels as disconnected from his younger brother (Larry Miller) as he does from the world. Kryzkowski's beautifully shot film shapes up as a character study that's both heart-wrenching and inspirational. Aidan Turner plays the younger Barr admirably, but this is Elliott's film, and his portrayal of a gruff but fair-minded man near the end of his days is top-notch. Viewers looking to see the type of action sequences the title promises will get what they are hoping for, but the drama surrounding Barr and those who try to be close to him is what will likely linger longer.

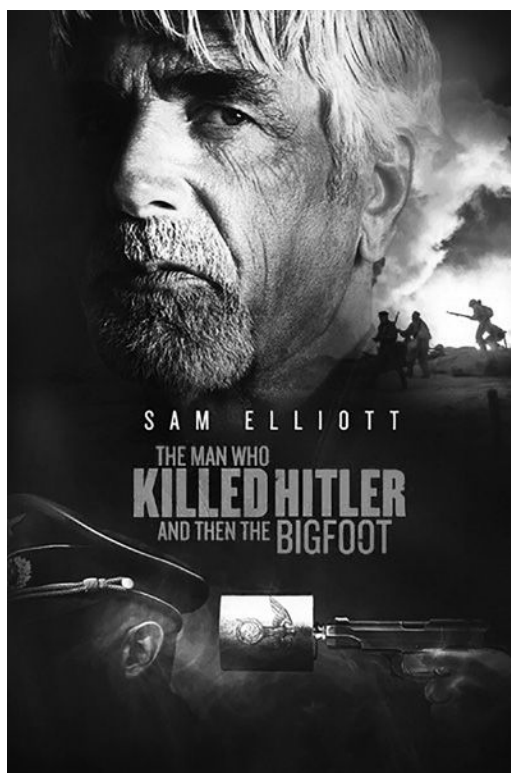
Lifechanger is a nifty Canadian horror thriller about a sort of shape-shifter (voiced by Bill Oberst Jr.) who travels from body to body to survive, leaving a trail of corpses behind. This creature is not without a sense of humanity, however, much like the classic cinematic monsters of yesteryear. Deep within its core, it holds a desire for a woman named Julia (Lora Burke) and does its best to be with her through a variety of human guises. Though writer/director Justin McConnell's film offers plenty in the kills and gore departments, the heart of the story is a romantic fable and a rumination on guilt. **Lifechanger** is a unique, wonderfully crafted film that delves deep into the motivations of its title character and the background of Julia, making events feel truly tragic rather than excuses to up the body count for the sake of cheap thrills.



Writer/director Andy Mitton's **The Witch in the Window** is heavy on domestic drama, and while that can work well in some movies about the supernatural, here it bogs things down a bit. There is plenty to admire in this tale of a broken family and the titular ghost that inhabits the Vermont fixer-upper home that father Simon (Alex Draper) has purchased, ostensibly to resell but in fact to try and win back the heart of estranged wife Beverly (Arija Barekis). Young teen son Finn (Charlie Tacker) is sent to live with Simon after Beverly finds him watching snuff news footage online, and the scene is set for some uneasy attempts at father-and-son bonding, complete with stilted dialogue and sometimes goofy character choices. Mitton wisely keeps the spectral menace on screen for long periods, forcing the dad-and-lad duo to make decisions knowing that something truly unearthly, and perhaps deadly, is afoot. The performances are earnest, and Mitton deserves credit for trying to do something different with the ghost-movie genre. Patient viewers who aren't out for jump scares and gore should find themselves rewarded.

This reviewer had a blast with the Canadian thriller **Knuckleball**, an action-packed nail-biter about a clever young boy—who seems to have an inventive side inclined toward the sadistic—pitted alone against a psychotic pursuer in a remote, snowy area. Henry's (Luca Villacis) parents drop him off for a visit with his grandfather Jacob (Michael Ironside) while they go to a funeral in another town. Henry's mother Mary (Kathleen Munroe) has bad memories of Jacob's home because her mother committed suicide there. The family situation only worsens when neighbor Dixon (Munro Chambers, who also played opposite Ironside in the terrific post-apocalyptic comedy **Turbo Kid** [VS #96]) tries to kill Henry. Skeletons in the family closet are exposed, and director Michael (Lloyd the Conqueror [2011]) Peterson—who co-wrote the screenplay with Kevin Cockler—ratchets up the action and suspense as he piles on the clever, sometimes alarming twists. The cast is superb, with Chambers giving a chilling turn as the psychotic villain in a performance remarkably different than his charming starring role in **Turbo Kid**, and Villacis shining in his portrayal of a 12-year-old boy in peril.

Fans of zany, over-the-top Japanese cinema should have a ball with **Rokuroku: The Promise of the Witch**, in which outre director Yudai (**Meatball Machine** [2005], **Yakuza Weapon** [2011]) Yamaguchi tones down his usual gore-driven style to co-direct a yokai (supernatural folklore) film with Keita (**Cyber Ninja** [1988]) Amemiya.



Twentysomething Izumi (Miho Nakanishi) is suddenly contacted after many years by childhood friend Mika (Shiho) in a story that ultimately grounds the anthology-style approach to the co-directors' reimaginings of several well-known yokai from Japanese folklore, where the arrogant and bad-mannered suffer deadly comeuppances. The creatures are the big draw here, and they range from the fantastical to the downright absurd, sometimes frightening in their appearance, other times done in by questionable CGI effects. Long-necked witches, umbrella goblins, sea-dwelling kaiju, and several other monsters are on display in a film that sometimes recalls the classic 1977 Japanese horror fantasy **Hausu** (VS #70). The relationship between Izumi and Miko is touching enough to keep things interesting on a human level as well, though some plot points go deliberately, and a bit frustratingly, unexplained. Overall, **Rokuroku** is a fun romp that should find favor with avid Japanese fright fare buffs.

Fantasia 2018's Best Film Award went to Daniel Roby's science fiction adventure **Dans la Brume**, which opened the festival, an apocalyptic thriller that sees Paris covered in a deadly white fog that threatens humanity's existence. Other Cheval Noir feature film award winners included Nosi-pho Dumisa for Best Director for **Number 37**, a Hitchcockian noir set in the slums of Capetown; Isa Mazzei for Best Screenplay for director Daniel Goldhaber's digital doppelganger chiller **Cam**, which also won the New Flesh Award for Best First Feature; Joshua Burge for Best Actor for his tragicomic couch-bound turn in **Relaxer**; and Kim DaMi for her portrayal of a telekinetic high schooler in the South Korean science fiction thriller **The Witch Part 1: The Subversion**. ☿

Tim Ferrante's SCORING SESSION

Hitchcock Classic!
Toho's Unbelievable Terror!
Q's Cues!
'70s Sci-Fi!
Killer Mexi-Shark!

Crowd-funding has taken hold with Intrada Record's Kickstarter campaign for Dimitri Tiomkin's **Dial M Murder** (1954). At press time, the label raised nearly half of its \$45,000 goal, the tab needed to re-record the Hitchcock classic's original score under the baton of William Stromberg, who'll conduct the Slovak National Symphony Orchestra. Reward levels range from \$25 to \$2000 (this one comes with a recording session invite and associate producer credit). It'll be a world premiere for the suspenser's music. The label recently released expanded 2-CD versions of Jerry Goldsmith's **The Mummy** (1999) and its 2001 sequel **The Mummy Returns** scored by Alan Silvestri. Gobs more music than their original counterparts. Price: \$29.95 per. Kronos Records revisits Robert O. Ragland's score for **Q—The Winged Serpent** (1982), adding a whopping 30+ minutes of previously unreleased music. Limited to a mere 300 copies, it's \$19.95. Toho Records debuts Akira Ifukube's complete score for **Varan** (1958). the disc also includes all of the music for its international version, **Varan the Unbelievable** (1962). A pricey import at \$46.95 that's well worth it. La-La Land Records tapped Universal's vault for the world premiere of Michel Colombier's inventive sci-fi tunes for **Colossus: The Forbin Project** (1970). It's the first CD in its Universal Pictures Film Music Heritage Collection. Capped at 3000 copies, it sells for \$19.98. The same label has a restored and remastered 2-LP 180-gram black vinyl gate-fold edition of John Williams iconic **E.T.—The Extra-Terrestrial** (1982). Only 1500 copies to go around, priced at \$39.98. La-La also prems **Mission: Impossible's** 1988 TV series reboot with music by Lalo Schiffrin and Ron Jones as a 2-CD set retailing for \$29.99 that's cleverly limited to 1988 copies. Dragon's Domain Records surprises with its **The Basil Poledouris Collection Vol. 3** that has reached back to two of the composer's '70s works. René Cardona, Jr.'s **Tintorera: Killer Shark** (1977) occupies nearly 90 minutes of the 2-CD set. Also included is a 1979 documentary entitled **Dolphin**. Previously unavailable music in any form, it's a very limited release of only 500 copies. Priced at just \$19.95, it includes digital download options. Steve Jablonsky's high-rising music for **Skyscraper** (2018) is courtesy of Milan Records for \$14.95. Y'all come back in 90, ya hear? ☿

FRANKENSTEIN 200: MARY'S MADDEST MONSTERS! By Don Vaughn

This year marks the 200th anniversary of the first publication of **Frankenstein: or, The Modern Prometheus** by Mary Shelley. Considered by many to be the first true science fiction novel, as well as a cornerstone of Gothic literature, Shelley's masterpiece has, over the centuries, inextricably wound its way into popular culture. Nowhere is this more evident than the movies, of which **Frankenstein** has inspired many, some good, some great, and some truly terrible.

In this informal survey we'll briefly explore some of the more unusual ways in which filmmakers have tapped into the **Frankenstein** legend, starting with the first attempt at bringing Shelley's story to the screen—the 1910 version, produced by Thomas Edison and written and directed by J. Searle Dawley. With a running time of approximately 16 minutes, the film offers an unusual take on Shelley's story, with Frankenstein's evil creation (Charles Ogle) literally disappearing at the end, defeated by Frankenstein's love for his wife, Elizabeth. Dawley's adaptation was long believed lost, though in 1963 stills from the film were discovered in the March 15, 1910 edition of *The Edison Kinetogram*. Nearly a decade later, it was revealed that a print of the film had been found in the collec-

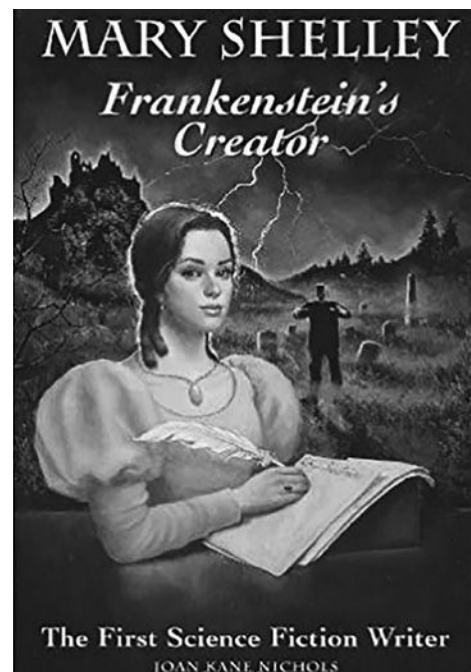
tion of film buff Alois Dettlaff, who had purchased it from his mother-in-law in the 1950s. It had collected dust in Dettlaff's possession for years, its historical significance unknown.

Dawley's **Frankenstein**, like most adaptations, attempted to stick to Mary Shelley's basic narrative, with some interesting flourishes. Of greater interest are those films that unabashedly refused to adhere to canon. One of my favorites is **Frankenstein Conquers the World**, aka **Frankenstein vs. Baragon**, a 1965 Japanese effort directed by Ishiro Honda. The plot in a nutshell: In the waning days of World War II, the seemingly immortal heart of Frankenstein's monster is taken by the Third Reich and handed over to the Japanese, who transport it to Hiroshima. Just as experiments are about to begin, Hiroshima is leveled by the atomic bomb and the heart is assumed destroyed. Years later, a feral boy with a flat-topped head is discovered in the countryside killing and eating animals. American scientists inexplicably call the kid Frankenstein and lock him up for study. Young Frankenstein (ha!) grows to an enormous size, breaks out, wreaks havoc, fights a giant dinosaur (Baragon) and ultimately perishes in the battle. This movie is a must-see for fans of *kaiju*, as well as those who appreciate just-plain-nuts Japanese weirdness.

Weirder still are **Frankenstein Meets the Space Monster** and **Jesse James Meets Frankenstein's Daughter**, two films with only a passing connection to Mary Shelley's book and a combined budget of around \$100. In **Frankenstein Meets the Space Monster** (1965), ol' Frank is actually a space-faring android who is horribly disfigured during an encounter with a Martian invasion fleet intent on stealing Earth's women. Meanwhile, **Jesse James Meets Frankenstein's Daughter**—released in 1966 on a double bill with **Billy the Kid Versus Dracula**—couldn't even get its story straight in the title; the film actually has the titular outlaw meeting the good doctor's granddaughter. It doesn't matter, though. Shot over eight days by William "One Take" Beaudine, **Jesse James Meets Frankenstein's Daughter** and **Billy the Kid Versus Dracula** wear their nonexistent budgets like moth-eaten cloaks from start to finish. Worse, they're boring as hell.

The '70s blaxploitation trend gave us another odd entry with **Blackenstein**, created to cash in on the success of **Blaclula**, released a year earlier. It was a valiant but ultimately fruitless effort. Lacking the charm and panache of **Blaclula**, which also featured the charismatic William Marshall in the title role, **Blackenstein**, aka **Black Frankenstein**, was an embarrassing failure.

While most Frankenstein films strive to scare, many have taken the opposite approach. **Abbott and Costello Meet Frankenstein** (1948) was perhaps the first Frankenstein-themed movie to add an element of humor, but it certainly wasn't the last. (Some might argue that



Mary and Monster share evocative cover of Joan Kane Nichols' excellent Mary Shelley bio.

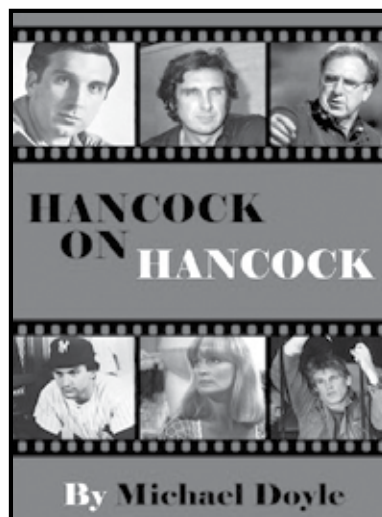
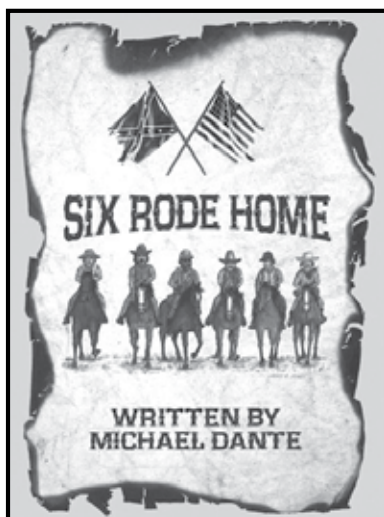
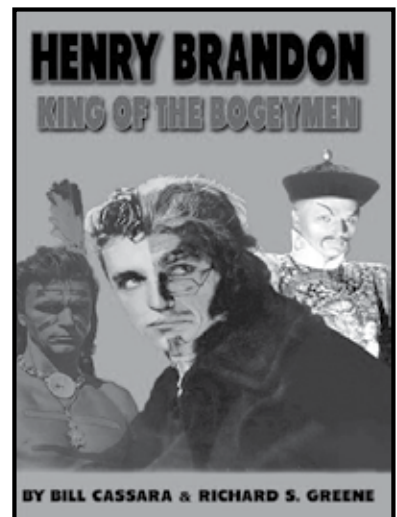
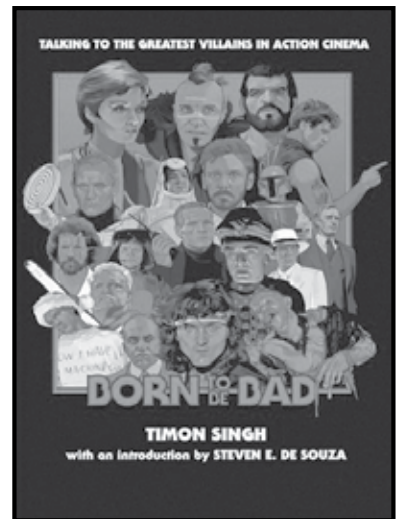
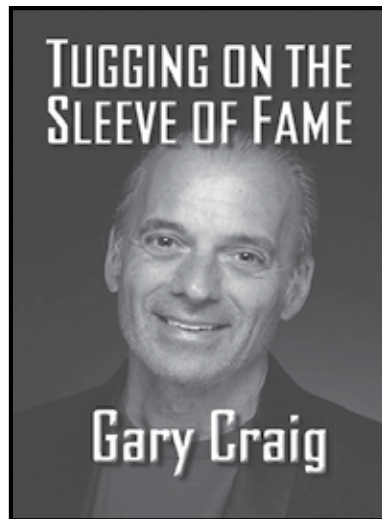
the first comedy to include Frankenstein's monster was **Sniffles and the Bookworm**, a 1939 Merrie Melodies cartoon, or the 1941 Olson & Johnson comedy **Hellzapoppin'**, both of which featured a cameo by the creepy character.) Other Frankencomedies of note include **Mad Monster Party**, **Alvin and the Chipmunks Meet Frankenstein**, **Frankenweenie**, **Rock 'n' Roll Frankenstein**, **The Rocky Horror Picture Show**, Frank Henenlotter's **Frankenhooker**, and Mel Brooks' pitch-perfect homage, **Young Frankenstein**.

James Whale's definitive 1931 version of **Frankenstein** was a shocker in its day but is considered tame today. Far more controversial was **Andy Warhol's Frankenstein**, aka **Flesh For Frankenstein**. Written and directed by Paul Morrissey and starring bug-eyed Udo Kier as Baron von Frankenstein, the 1973 film delivered copious amounts of graphic sex and gore, which was actually presented in 3-D in some markets. (Gratuitous liver-on-a-stick, anyone?) Understandably, the film received an X rating upon its initial release. Though Warhol was attached to the title, it appears that he had little involvement in the film's production; his name was included primarily for promotional purposes.

Dr. Frankenstein and his tormented creation remain among the world's best known (and loved) fictional characters, so it's logical that Hollywood continues to embrace them. Indeed, new movies featuring the man and his monster pop up with remarkable regularity, proving that the story has lost none of its appeal. How future filmmakers will approach Mary Shelley's book is anyone's guess, but no doubt audiences will once again rejoice at the demented cry, "It's...aliiiiiive!!!"



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Rob Freese's FOREIGN FEAR FLASHBACKS!

CODE RED

(\$19.95 Blu-ray) 7/18

DEVILFISH (1984) ♂♂1/2

D: Lamberto Bava. Michael Sopkiw, Valentine Monnier, Gianni Garko, William Berger, Iris Peynado. 94 mins.

Off the southern coast of Florida, a lab-created genetic nightmare is swimming amok and eating everything in its path, including middle-aged boaters who talk in ridiculously dubbed dialects. Dr. Stella Dickens (Monnier) notices that something is disturbing the surrounding marine life, as does perpetually perturbed Professor West (Berger), who encounters the oversized shark/octopus hybrid at sea. There are evil corporation guys who play dumb when they're not busy rubbing out anyone who wants to spill the beans re their DNA experiments gone bad. Computer expert Peter (Sopkiw) gets involved with Dr. Dickens and somehow becomes entangled in the effort to chase the creature into the Everglades and deep fry it with blowtorches. I make no apology for the junk I enjoy watching. This is a fun, easy-on-the-brain creature feature that shows just enough of the monster to satisfy when you're craving a little deep sea terror. Bava directs under the name John Old, Jr., which was a nod to his father Mario Bava, who directed a couple of films under the name John Old. Sopkiw is very likeable here, rounding out a short but fruitful career in Italian exploitation cinema. (Had he started a decade earlier, he no doubt would have shown up in a couple spaghetti westerns and Eurocrime thrillers.) Monnier is quite beautiful but is given little to do. If you're familiar only with the **MST3K** version of this film, the bloody violence and rampant nudity may be a bit unnerving. Extras include a fun commentary with star Sopkiw, trailers and reversible cover art with the alternate title **Monster Shark**.

MONDO MACABRO

(\$24.95 Blu-ray) 5/18

THE DEVIL INCARNATE (1979) ♂♂♂

D: Paul Naschy. Paul Naschy, Sara Lezana, David Rocha, Ana Harpo, Blanca Estrada. 92 mins.

Naschy is Leonardo, Satan made flesh after becoming bored ruling over Hell, turned into a man the better to conquer, exploit, humiliate and steal worldly treasures from all whom he encounters. Along the way, he meets a dimwitted slave boy, Tomas (Rocha), and teaches him the finer points of being a bandit. Leonardo beds nearly every

woman he encounters, only to rob them of something after his lustful desires have been sated. (Some he brands with his symbol, an upside-down cross.) He goes from convent to whorehouse, taking what he wants, but is always falling prey to the evil doings of man. The story goes full circle and ends with Satan cursing mankind for being more evil than himself. It is nothing less than delightful watching Naschy play the spirited devil, sporting a sharp mustache and beard and resembling Tom Savini more than John Belushi. While some scenes are strong on blasphemy and humiliation, you can't help but root for Naschy as he plays the devil with a perpetual excited gleam in his eyes. (Among his many misdeeds, he impregnates a woman who gives birth days after paying her debt to him and sells young Tomas to a gay lord.) In one scene he gives Tomas future dreams of the atrocities that will be committed by man, including war and the nuclear bomb. Later he is crucified next to a statue of Christ on the cross. Naschy also wrote and directed this departure from his usual monster rumble rallies. The subtitled HD presentation includes an introduction by Naschy, an interview with actor Rocha, behind-the-scenes Naschy history courtesy of his sons Sergio and Bruno, and a commentary by Naschy scholar Troy Howarth. Aka **El Caminate**, **The Devil Incarnate** is a great release for Naschy fans.

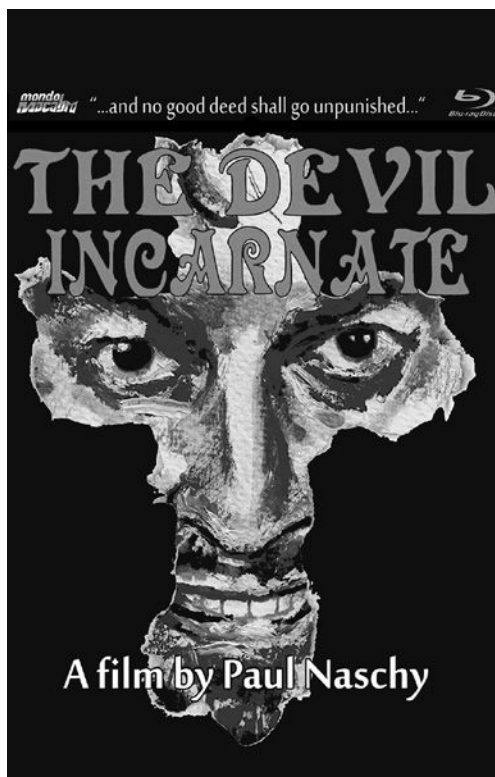
SEVERIN FILMS

(\$29.95 Blu-ray) 5/18

SHOCKING DARK (1989) ♂♂

D: Bruno Mattei (as Vincent Dawn). Christopher Ahrens, Haven Tyler, Geretta Geretta, Tony Lombardo, Dominica Coulson. 89 mins.

Venice is a dead city. The waterways are destroyed and now subterranean humanoids are attacking. Civilian doctor Sara Drumbull (Tyler) joins a squad of badass Marines called Mega Force to go under the city to save some scientist types and find out what is going on. They are accompanied by Samuel Fuller (Ahrens), a top man at the Tubular Corporation, the company that is working on reviving the city. The Marines go in, find out it's not a rescue mission, use this blinking, beeping thingee that lets them know when the monsters are coming. They find a little girl survivor. Sara and the girl get locked in a room with a monster. Sara gives the girl a tracker so she'll always be able to find her if they are ever separated. The little girl slides under the floor and gets trapped with a giant snot monster. Sara goes down to save her. Sound familiar? I'm not making any of this up. This is exactly what this insane flick is about. But wait, why rip off only one Jim Cameron flick when you can rip off two and reveal that one of the group is actually an exterminating cyborg who has been programmed to destroy the world with the snot-faced humanoids? Surprise! Now, I am the first person that will champion a rip-off movie as long as it's good. **After the Fall of New York** and **1990: The Bronx Warriors** are two of my fa-



vorites and they are hybrid rip-offs of **Escape from New York** and **Mad Max**. But in those examples real filmmakers with talent were at the helm. Here, thanks to the incompetence of Mattei and "scriptwriter" Claudio (Troll 2) Fragasso, the idea of a crazy combo rip-off of **Aliens** and **The Terminator** is more fun than its actual execution. Ideas are stolen. Scenes are stolen. Dialogue is stolen. At 89 minutes this sucker seems about 45 too long and the final 15 are probably the most excruciating moments of anything ever committed to celluloid. The monster effects are passable but, honestly, I've seen Cosplay Terminators that look way better than the Silly Putty-faced cyborg in this bore. Never before available on any U.S. home-video format—and if you give it a watch you'll realize what a blessing that was. People in other parts of the world were suckered into paying to see it under the fake-out titles **Terminator 2** and **Alienators**. Severin's presentation is way better than this garbage deserves. Extras include an alternate opening credits under the **Terminator 2** title, an **Alienators** video trailer, a fun interview with Geretta and an interview with lazy hack Fragasso and his partner in cinematic crimes against humanity Rossella Drudi. Remember kids, the idea of a good rip-off is to take a hit idea and try to do it better, make it bigger and take it farther than it went in the original movie. **Piranha II: The Spawning** gave the piranha wings and let those suckers fly and attack on land. **Zombie** took the zombies back to their voodoo origins but with more head shots and shark wrestling. **Jaws 3** added 3-D. Here, it's like watching the result of what a bunch of untalented kids shot with their dad's camera, attempting to copy two of their favorite films in one excruciatingly depressing home movie. ♂

SCREAM FACTORY

(\$27.99 Blu-ray) 6/18

ALIEN PREDATORS (1985) ♂♂1/2

D: Deran Sarafian. Dennis Christopher, Lynn-Holly Johnson, Martin Hewitt, Luis Prendes, J.O. Bosso. 90 mins.

Young Americans Damon (Christopher), Michael (Hewitt) and Samantha (Johnson) are traveling across a portion of Spain where, years before, pieces of Skylab fell, contaminating the countryside with alien microbes that kill livestock and drive humans insane. Dr. Tracer (Prendes) and Captain Wells (Bosso) are attempting to stop the spread of the microbes. The kids join up with the doc to try and get out of town as crazies burn the only bridge to safety. Will they make it out and what will be left of them? When old guys like me reminisce fondly about the "golden age of VHS," it is movies like **Alien Predators** that we're talking about. One day we wandered into the local Video Emporium and there on the new release shelf was the oversized Trans World Entertainment VHS of **Alien Predators**. Good cover art, starring the guy from **Fade to Black** and promising all kinds of gory extraterrestrial mayhem. We had never heard of it before but we rented it, watched it, and went on to the next new flick in a spiffy oversized box. **Alien Predators** is neither a great film nor an awful film. It's entertaining from start to finish, never seems to outstay its welcome and delivers enough of the red stuff to keep it from getting boring. (One scene sees a coyote eating a steer carcass only to be attacked by something inside the dead animal! And don't forget the microbe-tainted dude with his head all goobered up.) Watching it now I'm struck by how much the main characters tell each other amazing stuff, but none of it is ever shown. (Damon informs his friends of a crazed attack and car accident he witnessed but nothing is ever seen of the actual event. The doctor talks of people becoming psychotic and turning on one another but very little is ever shown of it, not even when our protags make their escape across the bridge.) An actual alien finally arrives in the wrap-up reel and it is pretty cool. At the end of the day, it's a fun little time-waster made on a tight budget that still gets the job done. Extras include a commentary by director Sarafian and a really long trailer that was probably produced as a promotional tool to entice vidstore owners to pick up a copy. This is a good example of how B movies evolved from theatrical double features to home-video fare aimed at the same audience. (**Alien Predators** is also available under the title **The Falling** on MGM DVD-R.) ♂

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The Phantom's FOREIGN FAVE

MONDO MACABRO

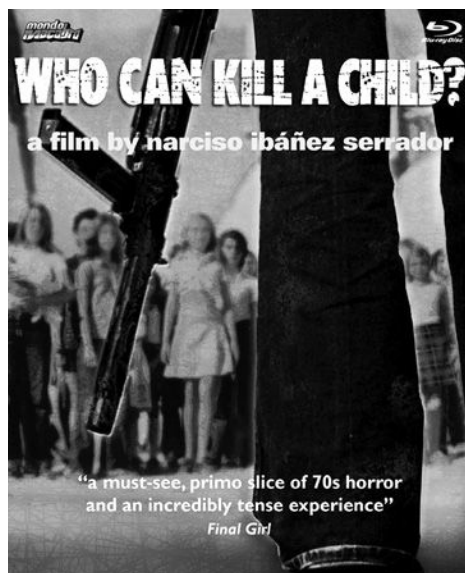
(\$24.95 Blu-ray) 7/18

WHO CAN KILL A CHILD? (1976)

♂♂♂1/2

D: Narciso Ibanez Serrador. Prunella Ransome, Lewis Fiander, Antonio Iranzo. 111 mins.

Village of the Damned meets **Night of the Living Dead** in this powerfully unsettling chiller. Loosely based on a novel by Juan Jose Plans, the film follows a British tourist couple—initially optimistic Tom (Fiander, in a role originally earmarked for Anthony Hopkins) and his pregnant wife Evelyn (Ransome)—as they journey to a remote Mediterranean island for a much-needed holiday. There, they find the formerly busy vacation hamlet nearly bereft of human life save for the local children, who are behaving oddly indeed. Director/screenwriter Serrador skillfully builds the tension as the frolicking youngsters systematically terminate the town's remaining adults—adults who, like Tom and Evelyn, are understandably slow to comprehend the situation and reluctant, per the film's title, to fight back with lethal force. While the roots of the deadly phenomenon are never overtly explained, Serrador makes it clear, both within his film and in a bonus interview, that the kids' collective revenge represents instinctive payback for the suffering visited upon the innocent throughout history by adult-engineered wars, famines and other atrocities. Though fairly light on explicit violence, the film, unfolding almost entirely in eerily bright sunshine and further sold by composer Waldo de los Rios' haunting score, is long on white-knuckle suspense. Mondo Macabro's new Blu-ray edition, a 4k transfer from the film negative, arrives with a documentary, interviews with Serrador and cinematographer Jose Luis Alacaine, audio commentary by James Deighan and Kal Ellinger, alternate opening sequence, critic Kim Newman on Killer Kids, and more. ♂



Rob Freese's 3-D DELIRIUM!

KINO LORBER

(\$34.95 Blu-ray) 4/18

THE MAZE 3-D (1953) B&W ♂♂1/2

D: William Cameron Menzies. Richard Carlson, Veronica Hurst, Katherine Emery, Michael Pate, John Dodsworth, Hillary Brooke. 80 mins.

On the cusp of his marriage to Kitty Murray (Hurst), Gerald MacTeam (Carlson) is called to his Scottish ancestral home after his uncle has been reported deceased. He goes away to take care of family business but then sends Kitty's stuffy Aunt Edith (Emery) a note saying the wedding is off and to tell Kitty he is sorry. Aunt Edith couldn't be happier because she wants no better life for her niece than that of a shut-in spinster like herself, but Kitty's not buying it and convinces her aunt to accompany her to Scotland. When they arrive, they find Gerald appearing 20 years older, gaunt and haunted-looking. He sits around reading books about Teratology (the study of abnormalities of physiological development) and having a short fuse. He forbids Kitty to stay, which in turn convinces her she must meddle in his business further. She goes so far as to invite friends over to visit. Aunt Edith sees something weird in Gerald's bedroom and faints dead away. Then, one night, in the off-limits hedge maze behind the castle, it is revealed that... I cannot tell you the surprise ending any more than I can believe it. Seriously, this was such an oddball revelation that I took the 3-D glasses off like they were causing me to hallucinate. I mean, I hate to spoil a movie but it has been out since '53, giving everyone ample opportunity to have seen it, so if you haven't by now... No, I won't give it away. Suffice it to say when I was assigned this film my esteemed editor slyly commented, "I'm interested to know what you think of the ending." I can only imagine the laugh he got when I sent my initial thoughts to him regarding this truly bizarre finale. This is a fun film with lots of cool trick photography. The 3-D makes it more fun, with the camera swooping down long corridors and various items constantly being thrust out toward the lens. Extras include a commentary by Tom Weaver, Bob Furmanek, Dr. Robert J. Kiss and David Schecter, an interview with star Hurst, and the original 3-D theatrical trailer. ♂



DINO-MITE!

PALEONTOLOGIST JULIA McHUGH: FROM KING KONG TO JURASSIC PARK As Told To Don Vaughan

Julia McHugh, PhD., knows a thing or two about dinosaurs—and dinosaur movies. This dual knowledge comes in handy because, as Curator of Paleontology at the Museums of Western Colorado in Fruita, McHugh often is peppered with questions from patrons about their favorite dinosaur flicks and whether their depiction of dinosaurs is scientifically accurate. On the eve of **Jurassic Park: Fallen Kingdom**'s disc release (Universal Studios, 9/18), **VideoScope** chatted with the dino-loving cinephile on what Hollywood gets right about these giant creatures from our distant past and the many, many things it gets wrong.—DV

DON VAUGHAN Julia, what are your responsibilities at the Museums of Western Colorado?

JULIA MCHUGH I'm the Curator of Paleontology, so that means I am in charge of all of the geoscience collections: geology, body fossils, plant fossils—basically all of the paleontology, all of the geology collections. I am also acting collections manager and lab manager. I lead our dig program and I teach at Colorado Mesa University. I am also the site manager, so I am responsible for the general care, upkeep and security of the building. I also do exhibit design and installation, as well as outreach, educational events and community events like our popular Dinosaur Days Festival in June. And I handle some of marketing and social media.

DV What drives your interest in paleontology? Why do you find dinosaurs so interesting?

JM I didn't really get into paleontology because of dinosaurs, I just happened into dinosaurs by accident. I'm actually more interested in the history of life and how life works and trying to figure out what happened on Earth before there were humans. I'm really interested in extinction events and how life copes with major environmental traumas and how some species die while others seem to live and what drives that. I'm also very interested in fossil bone histology and what it can tell us about growth and metabolism in ancient animals like dinosaurs. I actually spend most of my personal research time working on a group of extinct amphibians called the *temnospondyls*.

DV Are you often asked by visitors about the portrayal of dinosaurs in motion pictures?

JM It comes up from time to time, usually when we're doing outreach events, such as our popular Dinosaur Day public program. The question I get most often is, is this or that scientifically accurate or real? And the answer is almost always no.

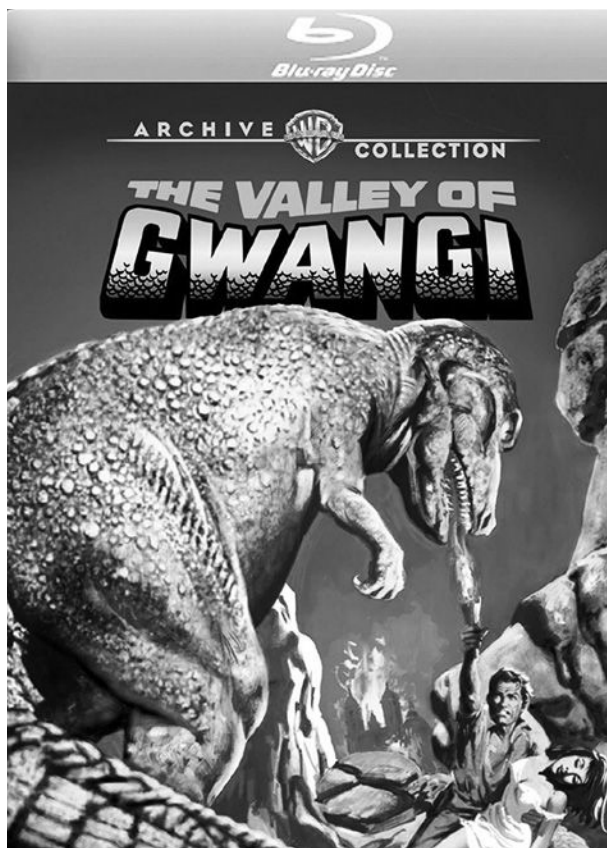
DV What was the first dinosaur movie you remember seeing?

JM My first dinosaur movie was probably **Fantasia**. I was a toddler and I remember being bored to tears by most of the movie. I appreciate it as an adult, but it really wasn't for kids who had a very short attention span. When I watched The Rite of Spring segment as a kid, I really liked it, but it seemed really dark. It was a dark sequence, and stormy, with dramatic, threatening music in the background. It wasn't really my favorite part of **Fantasia**, but I remember seeing the dinosaurs and wondering: Can't you make the sun come out so I can see what they look like? As a kid, I actually enjoyed the dancing hippos the best. I liked dinosaurs as a kid—every kid goes through a dinosaur phase—but my brother was far more into dinosaurs than I was. I thought, yeah, they're kind of cool, but I didn't really get into paleontology until I was 12 or 13.

DV Let's talk about how dinosaurs are portrayed in the movies.

JM One of the first animated cartoons featured a dinosaur: Windsor McKay's **Gertie the Dinosaur**. People have a fascination with these animals. They want to see them doing things, not just standing in an exhibit. It kind of breaks down into a few categories of what we knew at the time a particular film was made, how technology limited us regarding how filmmakers could bring dinosaurs to life. There is only so much you can do with clay animation, for example. Then you have stop motion animation, you have CGI, you have a guy in a suit. It's kind of hard to mask the person in a rubber suit because our bodies do not move the same way dinosaurs moved. Think back to the original *Godzilla*—it was a guy rumbling around in a rubber suit.

DV You bring up a valid point, that technology tends to drive what we can do with dinosaurs, starting with the earliest animation all the way up to today's CGI. In looking back at the films made with these technologies, what are your thoughts on their portrayal of dinosaurs—how they looked, their behaviors, etc.?



JM When you look at their behaviors throughout all of cinema, you can kind of group movie dinosaurs into one of two categories. They are either a monster who is threatening the protagonist, or they are a character interacting with the protagonist. You have movies like **The Valley of Gwangi**, in which the dinosaurs are there to scare you. They are monsters; their whole schtick is to be frightening and scary. Whereas when you get into the **Jurassic Park** franchise, especially the **Jurassic World** films, Blue the *Velociraptor* is an emotional character they are trying to make the audience bond to. So that affects what behaviors they do and sometimes even how they look. This even extends to movie animals that are not dinosaurs. Think of the movie **Mulan**. Her horse is a total character. It has a personality, it interacts with the other characters. If you look at a horse in a barnyard, the eyes are on the side of the head. But in **Mulan**, because the horse is a character and is supposed to be more humanlike, the eyes are facing forward like a human. So in the **Jurassic Park** franchise you have the animals that are roaring and trying to scare you versus the more humanistic animals like the *Brachiosaurus* in the tree that is basically acting like a puppy—"Feed me! Pet me!"—which is not something wild animals would do. Those sort of dynamics are meant to drive the story. They are not necessarily meant to educate like a documentary would.

DV You mentioned **The Valley of Gwangi**. Ray Harryhausen was a huge dinosaur fan. What are your thoughts on the film and Harryhausen's involvement?

“One big problem is that the *Velociraptors* in *Jurassic Park* are about 20 times larger than they were in real life.”

Julia McHugh

JM **Valley of Gwangi** came out in 1969, and in the 1950s, '60s and '70s, we were in an era in which dinosaurs were thought of as slow, sluggish, tail-dragging lizards. And that's how Ray Harryhausen portrayed them. The *T-Rex* stands like a tripod dragging its tail on the ground, which we know now is inaccurate. One of the things I always find hilarious is how movies always like to match up a horned dinosaur with a huge sauropod. Sometimes it's a *Triceratops* and a *T-Rex*, sometimes, like in **The Valley of Gwangi**, it's a *T-Rex* and a *Styracosaurus*. But Hollywood loves having these two gladiator-looking animals going at each other. And I'm always impressed by how the big, scary theropod comes out, announces its presence with a major roar, then goes to fight the herbivore and get a meal. I don't know if you've ever watched Animal Planet, but that's not usually what happens in a hunt. They sneak up from behind. They don't go, "Hey, you have a big horn on your face—I'm going to go straight at that." Everyone knew that at the time, but filmmakers want a big battle. They will kind of shoehorn that big battle anywhere they can, just to get it on the screen, whether or not it would have been natural for the animals to do it.

DV What are your thoughts on the physical appearance of dinosaurs in motion pictures? Are we portraying that accurately at this point in cinema history?

JM The first **Jurassic Park** movie came out in 1993, before they were able to CGI hair and feathers and individual fibers. That kind of technology simply wasn't available then. And now, the whole franchise is locked into that 1993 portrayal, so they have to sort of stay within their franchise box. One big problem is that the *Velociraptors* in **Jurassic Park** are about 20 times larger than they were in real life. Actual *Velociraptors* would have come up to your knees; they were very small. The movies also have the wrong head on them and their wrists are incorrect. In the first **Jurassic Park** they make a big deal about that half-moon shaped bone in a *Velociraptor*'s wrist. It prohibits the wrist from moving up and down, it can only move from side to side. I kind of raised my eyebrows when I saw that. You just had a huge discussion about that bone, then ignored it for the rest of the movie.

DV What do we know now about the color of dinosaurs? In the movies they're always gray or brown, but we know now that was not the case.

JM We knew a long time ago that that was not the case. Look at the natural world. Lizards—very colorful. Birds—very colorful. Snakes—very colorful. Filmmakers don't get a pass on this because we have always known dinosaurs were colorful. Now, with technology that allows us to look at pigment-generating cells in the fossils, we know that some of the herbivores may have blended more into their background, but many of the predators were more colorful, such as the rainbow iridescent mane on *Caihong juji*, a new type of dinosaur that was discovered in China earlier this year. So we could do a lot better with the color. We know for certain some of the color of some of the animals but there is still room for artistic license. The larger animals like the sauropods, which obviously would not need feathers to insulate their body heat because they were massive and by thermodynamics would stay warm all the time, would likely have had some sort of crest or decoration on their heads or necks for the same reason that birds have crests. To say, "Hello, come mate with me!"

DV What is your all-time favorite dinosaur movie?

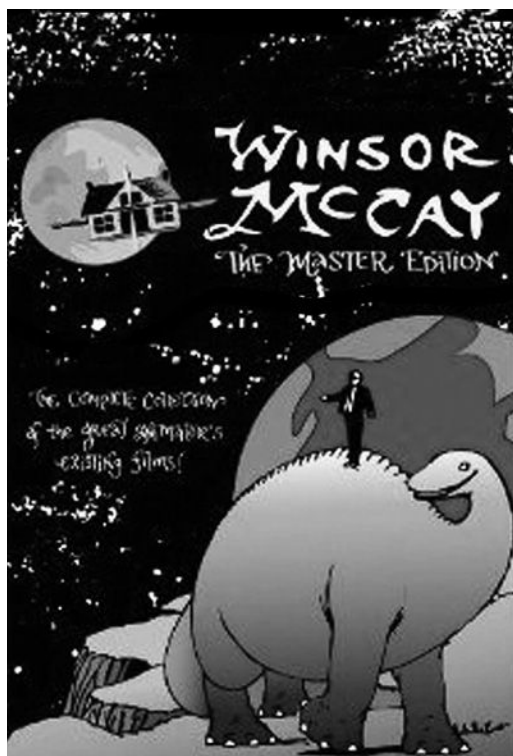
JM There are two that I like. For sheer nostalgia, I like the original **Land Before Time**. I still cry every time Littlefoot's mother dies. That movie had all sorts of inaccuracies in it, but it was a fun story with good characters. I also loved Disney's **Dinosaur**. That movie had a fantastic soundtrack.



DV Even though the dinosaurs talked, there was an effort to show a bit of realism as far as their environment. As a paleontologist, what are your thoughts about the science in **Dinosaur**?

JM What they did in that film was CGI the animals and put them against a real-life background. The problem with that is, the plants around today were not around during the age of dinosaurs. There were no grasslands in the Mesozoic era at all, so any time you see a dinosaur romping around in grass, well, that never happened. It worked for the movie because where today are you going to find a Mesozoic landscape? You're not. Again, they pulled the eyes forward on the *Iguanodons* to make them look more human-like as characters but they did a really good job of animating their forelimbs. When Aladar is crawling up on the beach after they escape the fireball, you see his forelimbs kind of pushing rocks forward. The middle digits on his hand—we have mummies of animals like *Iguanodons* and the hands are bound up in that little mitt with just the hitchhiker thumb spike and pinky coming off the other side. So they got that spot on. And his running motions they did really well.

DV I'd like to get your thoughts as a paleontologist regarding the 1933 version of **King Kong**. A variety of dinosaurs are represented here. What are your thoughts about their portrayal?



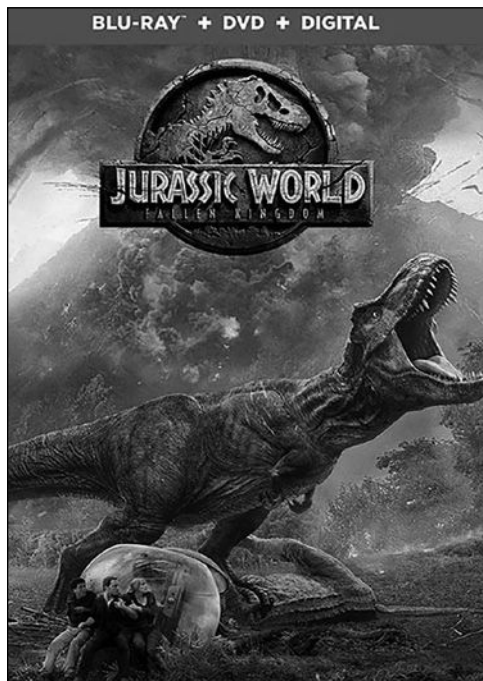
“Throughout recorded history there has been a boogeyman or a villain in stories and mythology, whether it was a titan or a cyclops or a fire-breathing dragon, and dinosaurs are the ones that were real.”

Julia McHugh

JM Other than a few little things, like *T-Rex* having three fingers on its hand—they had only two—you have a big predator see another large animal with something it wants to eat, so they start fighting over food. That happens all the time in the natural world. Kind of circling each other, living in an ambush predator type of situation in that dense jungle where you can come out and take some else’s kill. I thought that was pretty good.

DV There’s a lengthy sequence involving three hungry *T-Rex* in Peter Jackson’s 2005 remake of **King Kong**. More Hollywood goofiness, or is there a bit of scientific truth to their depiction? For example, is there evidence they may have worked together to catch prey?

JM There is no evidence that *T-Rex* worked together in packs, but if you had a mated pair, they would have been together. If we look at birds today, eagles tend to pair up and will go hunting together. But considering how big those *T-Rex* were in **King Kong** and how small Ann Darrow was, why were they fighting over her when there was all this other big dinosaur meat that was just outside their valley area?



BONING UP: Julia McHugh (center) and fellow paleontologists study and ready for removal newly unearthed fossil bones during recent dig at the Jurassic Mygatt-Moore Quarry in Western Colorado.
Photo Courtesy of Museums of Western Colorado

DV What is your opinion of *T-Rex* as portrayed in Jackson’s version of **King Kong**?

JM It was interesting because they kind of modernized them with a horizontal structure where they basically teeter-totter over the hind legs to get a more realistic posture. Still kind of scaly but with flashes of color. I loved the snaggle tooth on one of them. But they went back to the original Fay Wray version as a kind of homage and gave the *T-Rex*, again, a three-fingered hand.

DV Have you ever been asked to be an advisor on a dinosaur movie?

JM Not on a motion picture. I have done my fair share of documentaries, though. If they asked me, I would be flattered, but sometimes the production companies want to list you as a consultant to give legitimacy to whatever they are making, then they just don’t always listen to you. You’re a box to be checked.

DV Do you see movies like **Jurassic Park** as a recruitment tool for paleontology? Do they gin up excitement for this field of research? Or do they hurt the science?

JM What happens is, they generate a lot of pop culture interest in dinosaurs, so you see a lot of people remembering how much they loved dinosaurs and visiting museums and buying books. It’s kind of a jumping-off point to get back into the science. The downside is, you get a lot of people who want to be a paleontologist because they are enamored of the movies, but they are not enamored of the work that goes into it. There is a bit of culture shock once they get

further into school. It’s a bubble-burster. And then you get a lot of kids who, unfortunately, cannot tell the difference between Hollywood and a documentary. So they think whatever they see in a movie is real. Every summer I have kids who come up to me and want to argue for an hour that *Megalodon* [an enormous prehistoric shark] is alive and in the ocean. No, it’s not. I know you saw that on television but that is not true. Because TV channels like the History Channel and Discovery Channel are starting to pump out pseudoscience along with actual documentaries, kids are having a hard time telling the difference between them. Teenagers and older adults don’t usually have that problem, but the tweens and younger don’t have enough base knowledge to tell fact from crap, and it’s being presented as fact. It does them a real disservice. Have as much fun as you want, but don’t pretend it’s real science. The best we can do is help promote science literacy for the general public because that’s their best weapon for figuring out facts from crap.

DV Why do you feel dinosaur movies have been so popular over the years? What is it about dinosaurs that make them a natural for the screen?

JM Throughout recorded history there has been a boogeyman or a villain in stories and mythology, whether it was a titan or a cyclops or a fire-breathing dragon, and dinosaurs are the ones that were real. They are not made up—dinosaurs were really alive and walked on our planet. Dinosaurs are the best monsters for any movie. In **Avatar**, a lot of the animals are based on the fossil record. The fossil record provides artists and screenwriters and novelists with a raw canvas of inspiration. People usually think of dinosaurs and science, but they are actually inspiration for almost all of the arts. ☞

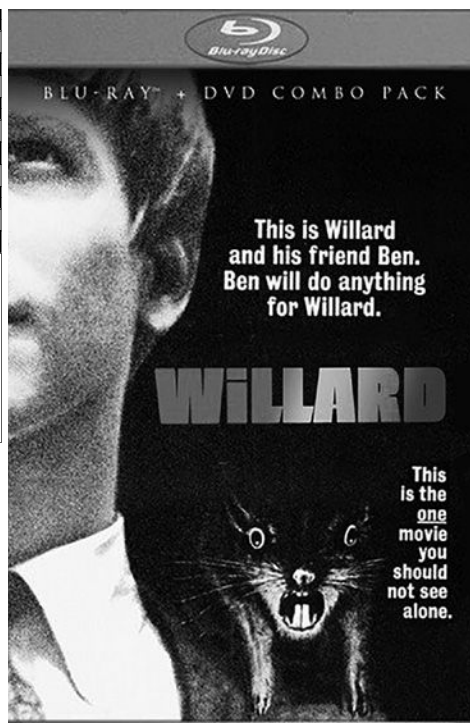
SPLIT SCREEN

Axes and Picks
with **VS Crix**
Tim Ferrante
& **Scott Voisin**

For this edition's *Split Screen* we reach back to the 1971 vermin-filled thriller **Willard**, directed by Daniel Mann, squaring off with Glen Morgan's 2003 remake. Will our scribes' fur fly in a bloody rumble to the death? *Gnaw...*

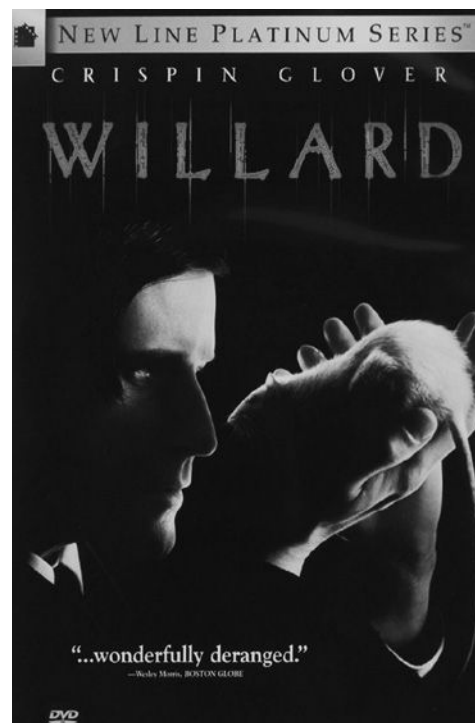
Scott Voisin: In the horror genre, some of the scariest creatures are those that we could encounter at some point in real life: spiders, snakes, sharks, etc. I never considered rats to be very high on that list, but Hollywood saw things differently, giving us two versions of **Willard**, a tale about a man who has a special connection to the rodents. The plot is identical in both films: The titular character has a domineering mother who is a chore to care for, he works for a scumbag boss, and he needs money to save the family house. When Willard discovers he has the ability to train rats to do his bidding, he uses them to exact revenge on those who have wronged him. The original, starring Bruce Davison, is a decent yet mild endeavor, barely qualifying as a thriller until its final reels. However, the premise is maximized to full effect in writer/director Glen Morgan's 2003 remake, with misfit specialist Crispin Glover assuming the title role. It's the rare instance of a remake improving on its cinematic predecessor in almost every way.

Tim Ferrante: I saw the original **Willard** once when it was theatrically released. I thought it was boring. I also skipped the remake believing it would be glossier boring. Rats presented as life-threatening creatures don't resonate with me. What did resonate was watching the original again through adult eyes and seeing what my adolescent self missed back in 1971. It's an excellent movie with solid actors, all working from an emotionally charged script by Gilbert A. Ralston based on Stephen Gilbert's 1968 novel, **Ratman's Notebooks**. The remake is an empty adaptation of Ralston's handling with an overly creepy Glover failing to sell the human/rat relationship. Davison? He *is* Willard. He immediately wins audience empathy with the opening scene and—as the main character—carries and convincingly funnels all of the story's emotional wringing to the viewer. Witness the tragedy of Willard's joy of acceptance by his new furry friends, finding solace and reciprocation among an ever-growing tribe of rodents. Or the unbearable humiliation his boss delivers in front of co-workers. It's a bitch of a character to play and Davison does so brilliantly.



SV: There's no question Davison does a wonderful job making the put-upon Willard a flesh-and-blood sympathetic schmuck. The problem is that he's stuck in the middle of a tepid melodrama billed as a horror movie. For the first two-thirds of the film, the rats could be replaced with adorable puppies and it would play *exactly* the same! It's not until the end that they become a "threat," and by that point, it's too little, too late. One of many missed opportunities in the original involves Willard's secretary surprising him with a pet cat to help ease his perceived loneliness. There's a meager attempt at suspense when the feline almost reveals Willard's secret army, so he gives the cat to a stranger—end of story. Morgan has more fun with this plot device when he has Willard put the animal into his house and lets the legion of rodents feast on it while brilliantly utilizing Michael Jackson's song **Ben**, the theme for the same-named 1972 sequel. It's a sequence that's alternately humorous, clever and fairly disturbing, which cannot be said of *anything* in the original.

TF: The original film will sometimes resolve scenes and ideas in an abrupt manner. There are fadeouts and wipes used as transitions where you'd typically not expect them, such as Willard's first meeting with Joan (Sondra Locke), his temporary assistant. Just as she introduces herself, the scene wipes to Willard in his backyard with the rats. It's an odd shift. So you're right about the remake handling the surprise cat present in a more satisfying way. The original has always been categorized as a horror film, as you say, but it really isn't one. Its exaggerated ad campaign warned, "This is the *one* movie you should not see alone." (Translation: Bring a date so we sell twice as many tickets.) There is no "horror" *per se* until the last 17 minutes with Martin's (Ernest Borgnine) murder by rats and lead rat Ben's tak-

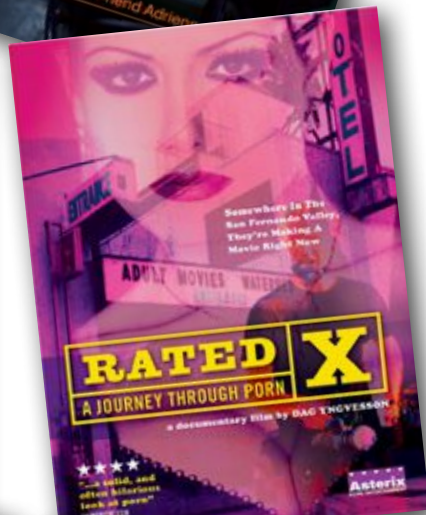
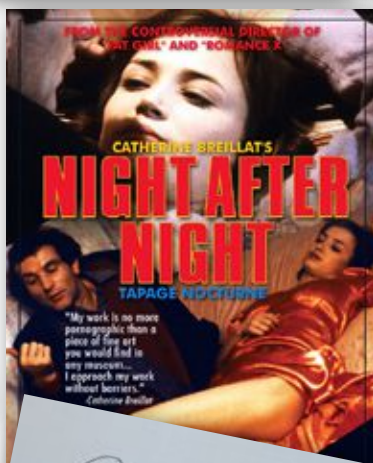
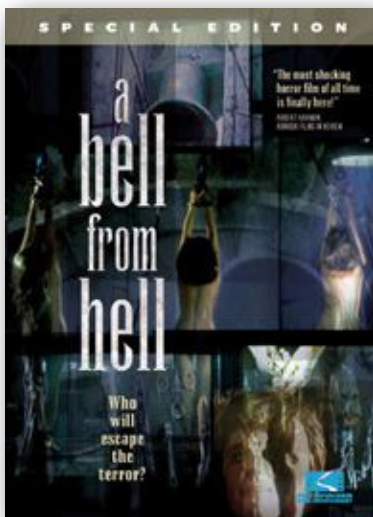
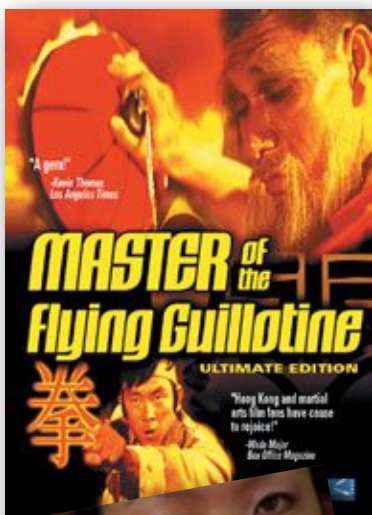


ing out of a traitorous Willard. Neither scene, though, is "scary." The film is instead brimming with pathos—that's where I believe it most excels and is something that is easily overlooked when you're expecting thrills and chills throughout.

SV: Look, the original isn't a bad flick by any means, but this is the rare Hollywood do-over I can get behind because it does what remakes should do: Keep what works and improve upon the weaknesses of the original. Both films are completely different in tone, so it depends on what you're looking for in a movie involving killer rats. Do you want the dramatic, somber tale of a lovable loser who is constantly kicked in the nuts by life's unflinching unfairness, or do you want to see the darker, creepy (and much more fun!) version where that same guy gets his revenge on the bastards who are making his life a living hell? The choice is yours, but know that 90 minutes of your life are on the line.

TF: Morgan's remake is clearly the more entertaining film for the modern audience. I didn't hate it, but, as I said, the original revealed things to me that as a young teen went unnoticed. Back then I had almost no awareness for the stellar performances, the deft script, the technical skill, or that the movie had any feeling at all. Further, I had completely forgotten that one of the giants among film composers had scored it: Alex North. He nails Willard's turmoil and rat romance just as veteran tunesmith Shirley Walker nails the heightened hokum of the remake. This is all a matter of taste and a bigger, campier, gorier treatment of **Willard** isn't mine. I understand the reasons for it, but its human story isn't suited for such meddling. What's even more distressing is that we're arguing over how the tale of a man and his killer rats should be told. It's enough to give one paw...**Y**

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BEST OF THE FESTS: PORTLAND HORROR FILM FESTIVAL

By Joseph Perry

The third Portland Horror Film Festival (PHFF) played to enthusiastic audiences during its June 13–16 run at Portland, Oregon's historic Hollywood Theatre. PHFF directors Gwen and Brian Callahan, who also head the long-running H.P. Lovecraft Film Festival, served up a terrific selection of fear features and shorts, along with intriguing guest Q&A sessions, a horror-themed burlesque dance showcase, and an after-hours trivia contest hosted by Horror Brew podcast hosts Matt and Catherine Holland.

Opening night saw the world premiere of **Big Legend**, a creature feature set and filmed in Oregon. Writer/director Justin Lee's cracker-jack addition to Sasquatch Cinema strikes a nice balance between human drama and Bigfoot bedlam. Kevin Makely topline as military veteran Tyler Laird, who surprises his girlfriend Natalie (Summer Spiro) with a marriage proposal during an off-trail camping trip. Nocturnal tree knocks and other eerie sounds separate the couple when Tyler goes outside their tent to investigate and Natalie is dragged away. The on-screen chemistry between Makely and Spiro makes this scene emotionally impactful. After living for a year in a residential psychiatric facility supervised by Dr. Wheeler (Amanda Wyss of **A Nightmare on Elm Street**), Tyler is released and encouraged by his mother Rita (genre-film legend Adrienne Barbeau) to return to the wild to learn what happened to Natalie. There he encounters mysterious loner Eli Verunde (Todd A. Robinson, who won the fest's Masque Rouge Award for Best Performance), who tells the skeptical Tyler he wants to see "the big man" for himself. Makely and Robinson form a fine heroic duo as they fight for survival against an aggressive Sasquatch (not a spoiler, as the titular beast is featured prominently in the pic's poster art). Genre-film icon Lance Henriksen also turns up for a brief but key cameo. Lee's confident helming and Adrian M. Pruett's gorgeous cinematography raise **Big Legend** several notches above the typical Bigfoot offering. Cryptozoological creature-feature fans will find plenty to cheer about here.

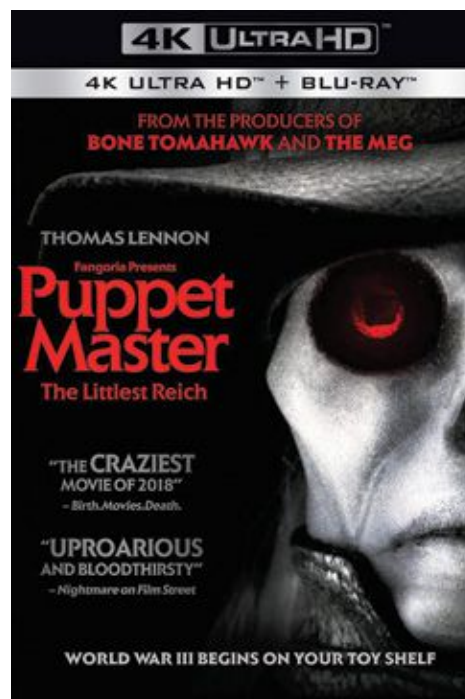
Also on tap on opening night were two blocks of superb shorts, including Main de Gloire (Special Jury Award) winner **Cecilia**, American director Liz Tabish's stylish take on 1960s European horror centering on the hypocrisy of villagers toward the eponymous character, wonderfully realized by Lindsey Lemke. Jealous wives, lustful husbands, a confused priest (Joe Vitale in a solid support-

ing turn), and others are suspicious of Cecilia's independent nature to the point of accusing her of witchcraft. Lush cinematography and a dizzying feel—aided by Tabish's realizations of Cecilia's visions—add up to a fabulous viewing experience. The Canadian short **Latched**, winner of PHFF's Horde Award (Audience Choice Award), is a true family affair. Writer and co-director (with Rob Brunner) Justin Harding is the husband of star Alana Elmer, and they are the parents of 14-month-old costar Bowen Harding. This supernatural creepfest with a dark fairytale-like quality involves a dancer (Elmer) who tries to protect her son (Bowen) from a grotesque creature that lurks in the nearby woods.

Jenn Wexler's colorful punks-vs.-psychotic forest official directorial debut **The Ranger** (VS #107) opened Thursday night's events, winning the PHFF audience over with its gruesome kills and Chloe Levine's fantastic star turn. The single block of shorts that night included the U.K. horror thriller **Dead Cool**. Each year, PHFF asks someone who has been long-vested in the horror film industry to be a guest judge and choose their favorite film for the fest's Bloody Judge Award. This year Brian (**Society**, **Bride of Re-Animator**) Yuzna did the honors and selected **Dead Cool**. Ben Adams topline in a truly chilling turn as Dc Mckie, who initially seems to be merely an obnoxious host at a dinner party for friends before writer/director Simon Ross takes this short into disturbingly dark territory.

The evening finished with a crowd-pleasing screening of **Framed**, a Spanish take on the recent crop of viral-Internet horror movies. Director Marc Martinez Jordan lays on the gore thick and often in this story of psychotic fame-seeker Invasor 1 (Alex Maruny in an over-the-top turn that stops just short of scenery chewing) and his vicious partners, who invade the home of partying young people and slaughter them on a live webcam stream. Some viewers could argue that there is satirical meat here about the levels to which some will stoop to gain momentary fame on the 'net, and about the lowest common denominators for what people will actually watch, but this reviewer found the film just another exercise in torture that wallows in human suffering.

Friday was headlined by **Puppet Master: The Littlest Reich**, which won the Caméra de Sang Award for Best Overall Feature, followed by a high-energy Q&A session with a spirited Barbara Crampton, who plays a tour guide and retired police officer. This fresh take on the twisted Full Moon franchise is a darkly comic satire, chock full of sick jokes and bucket loads of gore, addressing racism and sexual identity discrimination. Quite unexpectedly, though, it also displays a lot of heart, and the acting is fine throughout. With **Bone Tomahawk** (VS #98) and **Brawl in Cell Block 99** (VS #106) writer S. Craig Zahler scripting and co-directors Tommy Wiklund and Sonny Laguna at the helm, **Puppet Master: The Littlest Reich** delivers as a rollicking horror comedy best seen with a large, rowdy audience.



Two blocks of short films were also on tap, including the Canadian chiller **Compulsion**, a discomfiting look at a warped man and his deadly impulses. The short won the Goule D'or Director's Award for Brian Sepanzyk, who also wrote the script.

Saturday kicked off a family-friendly day with practical effects and makeup ace Chris Walas (David Croneberg's **The Fly**, **Gremlins**, **Enemy Mine**) giving a presentation called "Making Monsters," in which he discussed his storied career and revealed new projects like **Apes of Frankenstein**. Next the Italian science fiction horror offering and genre-festival favorite **The LaPlace's Demon** (VS #104) screened, along with a block of shorts showcasing two award winners. The Oregon-lensed project **Made You Look** scored the Abby Normal Award (Innovation from Rising Filmmakers), serving up a story of a boy held against his will and a monster in a garage, reminiscent of **Are You Afraid of the Dark?** Co-writer and star Kian Doughty is a pre-high-schooler with a great deal of talent, and co-writer and director Justin Zimmerman exhibits a knack for classic fright fare. **Brace Face** deservedly won the Funny Bone Award (for Horror Comedy), with Michelle Stahl standing out as a supportive wife with a wild libido. Dave Shecter costars as her husband; their titular daughter (Adaryn Healy) is bullied because of her family's eccentric behavior. Bullies usually get a gruesome comeuppance in horror films, and this short proves no exception. PHFF's awards ceremony then capped off this year's festival.

The PHFF expanded an extra night for a total of four, and that looks to be the plan for 2019, too, with tentative dates of June 5–8 announced. The fest is the Pacific Northwest's premiere scare-fare event, and the Callahans are doing a fine job of making it bigger and better every year. ☞

The Phantom's FEAR FILM FAVES!

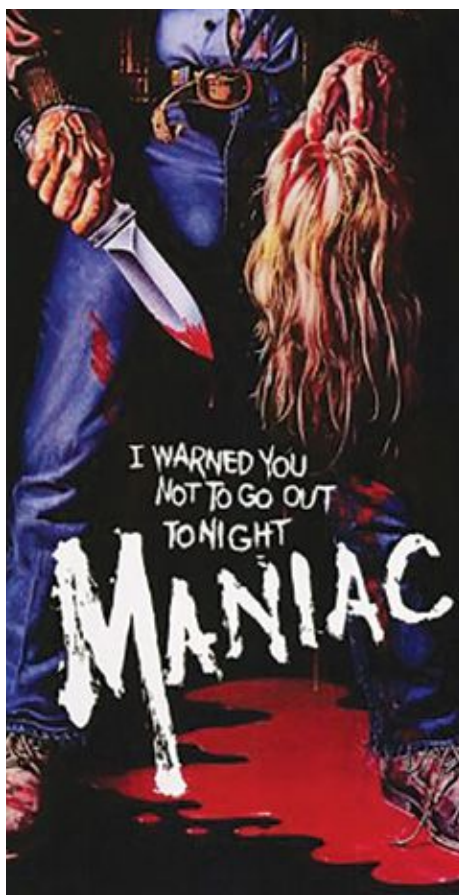
SHOUT! FACTORY

(\$29.99 Blu-ray each) 9/18, 8/18

BRAIN DEAD (1990) ♂♂♂

D: Adam Simon. Bill Pullman, Bud Cort, Bill Paxton, Patricia Charbonneau, George Kennedy, Nicholas Pryor. 84 mins.

Your Phantom's admittedly a sucker for surreal shockers, especially when they involve deranged brain experiments. (We wouldn't go so far as to say we've never met a deranged brain-experiment movie we didn't like, but that wouldn't be too far off the mark.) Simon's **Brain Dead** represents a welcome addition to this cerebral subgenre. Updated from a previously unfilmed script (originally titled **Paranoid**) by the late, great scare scribe Charles Beaumont, who wrote many of **The Twilight Zone**'s best episodes, **Brain Dead** stars Pullman as Rex Martin, a neurologist so in love with his work that he talks to the preserved, jar-encased brains that line his lab. Martin's troubles begin when corporate creep Jim Reston (Paxton) enlists him to retrieve a vital mathematical formula buried deep in the addled cerebrum of paranoid genius James Halsey (Cort, in a memorably over-the-top turn). No sooner does our hero consort with Halsey than he too descends into total paranoid lunacy. Or does he? Only sinister shrink Ramsen (Pryor) seems to know for sure, and he may be jiving too. Aside from conscious nods to **Re-Animator**—Martin is a graduate of H.P. Lovecraft's infamous "Miskatonic" med school—and the notorious nympho-ward scene from Sam Fuller's **Shock Corridor**, **Brain Dead** wisely plays its mad material straight. Add graphic brain-surgery close-ups, a cameo by the legendary George Kennedy as a craven corporate head, and inventive nightmare imagery and you have one of the '90s' freshest frightfests, guaranteed to keep adventurous viewers both guessing and gasping. Director Simon—whose main claim to fame may be as a fleeting opening-reel audio in-joke in Robert Altman's **The Player** (VS #2)—deserves credit for recognizing the brilliance of Beaumont's script and bringing it to healthy hallucinatory screen life. Extras on Shout!'s new Blu-ray include an audio commentary with director Simon and co-writer Rodman Flender, deleted scenes, and original trailer. Shout! also issues a bonus-laden Blu-ray of John Flynn's 1991 chiller **Brainscan**, starring Edward Furlong and Frank Langella, arriving with audio commentaries, interviews, behind-the-scenes featurettes, deleted scenes, trailers, TV spots and more.



THE UNBORN (1991) ♂♂1/2

D: Rodman Flender. Brooke Adams, James Hayenga, James Karen, Lisa Kudrow, K Callan. 84 mins.

A variation on Larry Cohen's **It's Alive** killer-infant trilogy (with even deeper roots in **Rosemary's Baby**), **The Unborn** stars Adams as Virginia Marshall, an infertile children's-book author who, with lawyer hubby Brad (Hayenga), consults upscale fertility expert Dr. Meyerling (Karen). Said visit soon leads to a series of creepy artificial insemination procedures. Despite the doc's assurance that "this is not a gothic novel," Virginia finds herself pregnant with your typical genetic mutant. Adams, whose character already suffers from preexisting mental imbalances, delivers an intense perf as the understandably paranoid monster-mom-to-be. Callan supplies dark comic relief as Virginia's even nuttier mother Martha. Upon observing her extravagantly pregnant daughter smoking cigarettes and knocking back hard liquor, mom remarks, "Isn't that bad for the baby these days?" **The Unborn** is at its best when satirizing sinister medicos, slick media types, and pretentious New Agers, like the lesbian couple who ban fathers from their holistic birthing classes because they consider them "outsiders" (!). Electronica pioneer Gary Numan composed the effectively spooky score. **The Unborn II** (VS #11) followed three years later. **Scream**'s new 2k restoration Blu-ray includes a fresh audio commentary by director Flender and fellow filmmaker Adam (**Brain Dead**) Simon. ♂

Rob Freese's SLASHER CLASSIC FLASHBACK!

BLUE UNDERGROUND

(\$39.95 3-Disc Limited Edition Blu-ray + DVD + CD) 12/18

MANIAC (1980) ♂♂♂

D: William Lustig. Joe Spinell, Caroline Munro, Abigail Clayton, Tom Savini, Hyla Marrow, Sharon Mitchell. 88 mins.

Frank Zito (Spinell) is an ugly, sweaty, scabby sleazoid living in a rundown apartment decorated with bizarre posters and artwork as well as department store mannequins with the scalps of murdered women nailed on their heads. Zito is a depraved, murderous psychopath who wanders the dark streets of New York City looking for victims to slash, stab, garrote and shotgun to death. Somehow, ditsy fashion photographer Anna D'Antoni (Munro) is receptive to the guy. They go on a date, eat cheese sticks, then detour to the graveyard so Frank can freak out while hallucinating that his wicked mother is crawling out of her grave. Anna flees into the night with the hulking psycho in pursuit. Spinell is only on screen a few seconds before we instantly believe he is capable of the disgusting acts of violence on display. **Maniac** sparked serious outrage when it was released theatrically, where it had a successful run before becoming a big hit on the then-burgeoning home-video market. (I still remember walking into video shops and seeing the **Maniac** poster tacked to the wall.) The flick has lost none of its power to unnerve. What helps make the film such a brutal viewing experience is the great acting. During one harrowing scene in which a nurse is stalked in a subway bathroom, the actress (Kelly Piper) portraying the nurse sells the fear so well you physically feel a punch to your gut when Zito appears behind her in a mirror. This over-the-top, gritty stalk 'n' slash flick is also a showcase for some of Savini's best special effects. Fans have debated for years over the ending. This three-disc special edition provides a plethora of bonus material: an audio commentary with auteur William Lustig and producer Andrew Garroni; a second track with Lustig, Savini, Joe Spinell, editor Lorenzo Marinelli, and Spinell assistant Luke Walter; interviews with Munro, Savini and composer Jay Chattaway; **Returning to the Scene of the Crime** featurette with Lustig; the documentary **The Joe Spinell Story**; Lustig visiting songwriters Michael Sembello and Dennis Matkosky to find out if his movie inspired the hit single "Maniac" for the film **Flashdance**; archival TV appearances, including Joe Spinell on **The Joe Franklin Show**; a **Maniac** Controversy gallery of newscasts showcasing the picketing of the movie by feminist groups; outtakes, trailers and TV spots; a collectible booklet by Michael Gingold; and more. If you're a fan of the film, which is recognized by most as a classic of slasher cinema, then I heartily recommend this set, even if you have one of the many previous editions. ♂

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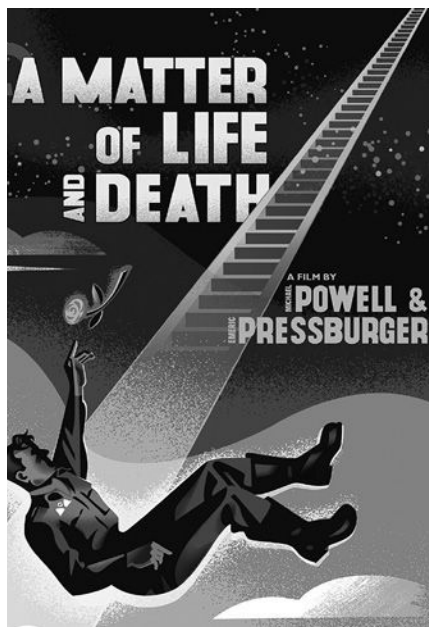
(\$39.95 Blu-ray) 7/18

A MATTER OF LIFE AND DEATH

(1946)Color/B&W 888

D: Michael Powell, Emeric Pressburger.
David Niven, Kim Hunter, Roger Livesy,
Raymond Massey, Robert Coote, Marius
Goring. 104 mins.

In the Powell/Pressburger (aka the Archers) team's elaborate fantasy, a charming Niven stars as Peter Carter, a seemingly doomed RAF pilot who, due to an otherworldly oversight, survives his intended demise long enough to fall in love with WAC nurse June (a winning Hunter, fresh from her endangered turn in the brilliant Val Lewton thriller **The Seventh Victim**). To settle this celestial snafu, our hero, with the help of recently deceased doctor friend Frank Reeves (a charismatic Livesy, late of the Archers' military character study **The Life and Death of Colonel Blimp**), agrees to plead his case in a heavenly court. The dual auteurs sprinkle their supernatural story with now-dated geopolitical satire, including a fractious battle of words on the subject of England, defended by Dr. Reeves, vs. America, championed by self-righteous Revolutionary War fatality and acting prosecuting attorney Abraham Farlan (Canadian actor Massey), along with a generous dose of sentimentality that at times borders on the treacly. The filmmakers make dazzling use of a glorious Technicolor canvas, painstakingly painted by production designer Alfred Junge, for their earthly sequences and a stately monochromatic black and white, strikingly captured by cinematographer Jack Cardiff, for the heaven-set scenes. We originally caught **A Matter of Life and Death** under its alternate title



Stairway to Heaven on a Columbia Pictures VHS tape; Criterion's 4k restoration Blu-ray reps an eye-opening experience. Criterion's generously augmented edition arrives with a 2008 interview with director/admirer Martin Scorsese, a new interview with Scorsese's longtime editor and Michael Powell's widow Thelma Schoonmaker, a 2009 audio commentary featuring film scholar Ian Christie, a fresh featurette focusing on the film's special effects, the 1998 Jack Cardiff profile **The Color Merchant**, a 1986 appearance by Powell on the British TV show **The South Bank**, a restoration demonstration, and an essay by critic Stephanie Zacharek.

KINO LORBER FILMS

(\$29.95 Blu-ray each) 7/18

A STRANGE ADVENTURE (1956)B&W

888

D: William Witney. Joan Evans, Ben Cooper, Marla English, Jan Merlin, Nick Adams, Peter Miller. 70 mins.

Kino rescues another fun Republic obscurity (see also director Joe Kane's **The Man Who Died Twice** [VS #105]) from the celluloid scrapheap with this offbeat caper helmed by longtime serial auteur William (Perils of Nyoka) Witney, who flexes his action muscles in a couple of spirited, furniture-damaging fight scenes. (Witney later chronicled his screen exploits in his tome **In a Door, Into a Fight, Out a Door, Into a Chase: Moviemaking Remembered by the Guy at the Door** [McFarland]). Johnny Guitar alum Cooper plays Harold Norton, an 18-year-old hotrodder, currently consigned to performing menial chores at his mother's motel in a low-glam L.A. nabe, who swoons over shapely singer (and "swimming pool Delilah," per our protagonist's disapproving mom) Lynn Novak (a knockout English). When two thugs, Al (Merlin, channeling Richard Widmark) and Phil (Adams, nursing a persistent cold), show up claiming to be Lynn's show-biz contacts, gullible Harold is coerced into serving as their getaway driver for an armored car heist. The hoods and their moll hide out in a remote mountain weather station, where they hold Harold along with brother and sister meteorologists Luther (Miller) and Terry (Evans, who has the hots for our hero) hostage. Unlikely incidents abound with a B-movie enthusiasm that's tough to resist. Witney and scripter Houston Branch frequently employ the hoary, cost-cutting trope of moving the story along via radio news bulletins, while little attempt is made to surround the cabin with anything remotely resembling actual snow. Kino's sharp Blu-ray accentuates the cheap sets and process shots, which mostly adds to the pic's threadbare charm. Young Adams is quite effective in his role as a dim, eccentric, beer-swilling henchman who can't keep his nose or throat dry, with little hint of his near-future celebrity as TV western icon Johnny Yuma in **The Rebel**. Extras include an audio commentary by film historian Toby Roan and Jay Dee Witney, the late director's actor son.

CAPTIVES OF A RUTHLESS KILLER!



JOAN EVANS • BEN COOPER • MARLA ENGLISH • JAN MERLIN

A STRANGE ADVENTURE

TIGER BY THE TAIL (1970)881/2

D: R.G. Springsteen. Christopher George, Tippi Hedren, Dean Jagger, Charo, John Dehner, Lloyd Bochner, Glenda Farrell. 97 mins.

When 'Nam vet Steve Michaels (George) returns to his Southwest hometown to reconnect with his older racetrack owner brother (Dennis Patrick), he quickly becomes a suspect in the latter's subsequent murder and spends the rest of the pic trying to clear his name and nail the true perps. Longtime B-movie director Springsteen's filmic farewell shapes up as an unremarkable but watchable potboiler buoyed by the presence of several familiar faces, with special kudos owed frequent western villain Dehner as a polysyllabic sheriff and perky mono-monickered Charo as a club entertainer with a fondness for bikinis. Other welcome thespians include **Gilligan's Island** skipper Alan Hale, Skip (**The Tall T**) Homeier, R.G. (**Ride the High Country**) Armstrong, and Glenda (**Mystery of the Wax Museum**) Farrell as a local ballistics expert. Working against the flick are a frequently slack pace, a lackluster turn by erstwhile Hitchcock lust object Hedren, and a TV movie-style lounge jazz score. **Tiger by the Tail** still packs sufficient nostalgia value as the type of fare that would fill out a drive-in double bill before making its way to late-night TV. Extras include an audio commentary by film historians Howard S. Berger and Nathaniel Thompson.

—The Phantom

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THE COLOSSUS OF RHODES (1961)

88 1/2

D.: Sergio Leone. Rory Calhoun, Lea Massari, Georges Marchel, Conrad San Martin, Angel Aranda, Roberto Camardiel. 127 mins.

The most interesting thing about this meandering sword-and-sandal would-be epic is that it is Leone's first film. He had worked as a second unit director on **Ben Hur** and **Quo Vadis** and, in search of a comparably compelling story, developed and co-wrote, with 13 (!) others, a very unremarkable, workmanlike script. Look for hints, notably in editing and visual flourishes—a solitary dog trotting across an empty square doubling down on a haunting mood—setting the tone and style of what was to come. Additionally, **Colossus** was filmed in Super Total-Scope (one of CinemaScope's many widescreen competitors), a super 35 process with a multitude of lenses optimizing more of the film's picture area (the process used the frame that movies occupied before the advent of sound from sprocket hole to sprocket hole) popular in Europe from 1956 to 1966. The second most interesting thing is Leone's elaborate Colossus, a re-imagined replica, with trick staircases, drawbridges and eye exits, of the 100-foot statue of the Greek sun god Helios, one of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World, erected to straddle the harbor of Rhodes in 280 B.C., then felled by an earthquake in 226 B.C. Then it's back to the prosaic and occasionally confusing plot involving Darios (Calhoun), a stranded Greek traveler, entranced by Diala (Massari), deviant daughter of the statue's doddering, Merlin-like creator, impressed by rebel leader Peliclos (Marchel) into rebelling against

tyrannical king Serse (Camardiel). Mannered flirting fills the gaps while yet another mischief-minded band of Phoenicians, intending their own coup, are smuggled into the Colossus for the requisite sword fight, boat fight, et al. Leone works the genre; magic eludes him. Prolific actor, sometimes writer and producer Calhoun does his best, but you know the film is in trouble when you'd rather escape antiquity for 1954 to watch Calhoun lose Marilyn Monroe to Robert Mitchum in **River of No Return**.

—Nancy Naglin

YOUNG DILLINGER (1965) B&W

88 1/2

D: Terry O. Morse. Nick Adams, Mary Ann Mobley, Robert Conrad, John Ashley, Victor Buono, Dan Terranova, John Hoyt. 100 mins.

A pet project for former TV star Adams emerges as something of a fascinating mess. With no attempts at period authenticity beyond a few vintage cars, Adams (as a miscast John Dillinger) and real-life pals Conrad (Pretty Boy Floyd), Ashley (Baby Face Nelson) and Terranova (fellow gang member John Hamilton) barrel through a largely fictionalized, frequently laughable account of the erstwhile Public Enemy #1's early exploits. Here, Dillinger begins his criminal career by ripping off a warehouse owned by quintessentially '50s-style squeeze Elaine's (a fairly awful Mobley) wealthy dad, with Elaine's willing participation. After a stretch in stir where he meets his future cohorts, Dillinger gets down to more serious capers, targeting banks, armored cars and other cash repositories. While **Young Dillinger** displays zero authenticity, it does contain some notably raw scenes, from plastic surgeon Dr. Wilson's (Hoyt) botched job on John D. and harrowing attempted rape of Elaine, to a brutal beating administered to our antihero by mob czar Rocco's (Anthony Caruso) goons, to a hyper-violent armored truck robbery—enough ultra-V, in fact, to attract the attention of contemporaneous censors (even if much of the chase and shootout footage was lifted intact from producer Al Zimbalist's earlier crime romp **Baby Face Nelson** [see sidebar]). Another offbeat scene plays like pure Cassavetes (whose work Adams admired), when John D. and pals engage in obviously ad-libbed drunken antics at their wooded hideaway (Mobley even calls Adams "Nick" rather than "John" at one point). The ever-dependable Victor Buono, the Laird Cregar of his generation, supplies a welcome boost as Prof. Hoffman, a droll, cerebral heist mastermind who silent-partners with the gang. The film doesn't end so much as simply fade out, with John D. escaping on foot following a shootout with feds. **Young Dillinger** may fall far short of classic status but rates as a must for true-crime movie buffs. Unfortunately for Adams, he died of a drug overdose (suicide was suspected) less than three years later, age 36.

—The Phantom

The Phantom's

HOLLYWOOD CRIME WAVE!

In the late 1950s, Hollywood launched an informal cycle of celebrity outlaw flicks, kicking off with Don Siegel's blistering biopic **Baby Face Nelson** (1957), starring Mickey Rooney as a notorious 1930s bank-robber aligned with Leo Gordon's John Dillinger; Mick continued his criminal ways as tough guys Little Joe Braun in the Albert Zugsmith-produced expose **The Big Operator** and Killer Mears in Howard W. Koch's remake of the 1932 death row chestnut **The Last Mile** (both 1959). Not to be outdone or outgunned, the drive-in specialists at AIP delivered veteran action auteur William Witney's **The Bonnie Parker Story** (1958), a hip, fast-paced take on infamous crime couple Bonnie Parker and Clyde Barrow (herein redubbed "Guy Darrow") later personified by Faye Dunaway and Warren Beatty in Arthur Penn's iconic **Bonnie and Clyde** (1967); here, TV actors Dorothy (**The Roaring '20s**) Provine and Jack (**Combat!**) Hogan turn in fine work as the terminating two-some, aided and abetted by the peerless Dick Bakalyan as Bonnie's jail-sprung hubby, Duke Jefferson. AIP paired the pic with Roger Corman's **Machine Gun Kelly** (1958), with Kelly portrayed (somewhat accurately) by Charles Bronson as a cowardly wannabe big-shot goaded into the criminal life by his pushy mate Flo Becker (Susan Cabot) in an oft-anachronistic rendering highlighted by comic Morey Amsterdam, who steals his scene as homosexual cohort Fandango. Other rural crime figures to receive their own B-movie showcases included Herbert J. Leder's **Pretty Boy Floyd**, with John Ericson as the handsome hardcase, and **Ma Barker's Killer Brood** (both 1960), with normally demure actress Lurene Tuttle taking up the tommygun as the titular maternal menace, while Eric Sinclair cameos as Dillinger.

Once **The Untouchables** hit the tube in 1959, urban gangsters became the order of the day as studios lined up Rod Steiger as a cigar- and scenery-chewing **Al Capone** (1959), directed by Richard Wilson, David Janssen as the infamous fixer in Joseph Newman's **King of the Roaring '20s: The Arnold Rothstein Story** (1961), sneer specialist John Davis Chandler as Burt Balaban's **Mad Dog Coll** (1961), an extraordinary (and Oscar-nominated) Peter Falk as enforcer Abe "Kid Twist" Reles in Balaban and Stuart Rosenberg's expose **Murder, Inc.** (1960), Vic Morrow as Dutch Schultz in Joseph Pevney's **Portrait of a Mobster** (1961), Ray Danton as the eponymous characters in Budd Boetticher's **The Rise and Fall of Legs Diamond** (1960) and Joseph Newman's mobbed-up **The George Raft Story** (1961), and Robert Blake as the leader of **The Purple Gang** (1959) in Frank McDonald's highly fictionalized account of the Detroit-based outfit. **Young Dillinger** belatedly capped the era until the aforementioned **Bonnie and Clyde**'s 1967 arrival kicked off a fresh crime wave. 8

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ABOUT NANCY NAGLIN:

Author, film critic and freelance writer Nancy Naglin has been the Art-House columnist for *The Phantom of the Movies' VideoScope* since 1993. Her work has appeared in numerous publications, including *The New York Daily News*, *New York Magazine*, *The Village Voice* and *Crawdaddy*.

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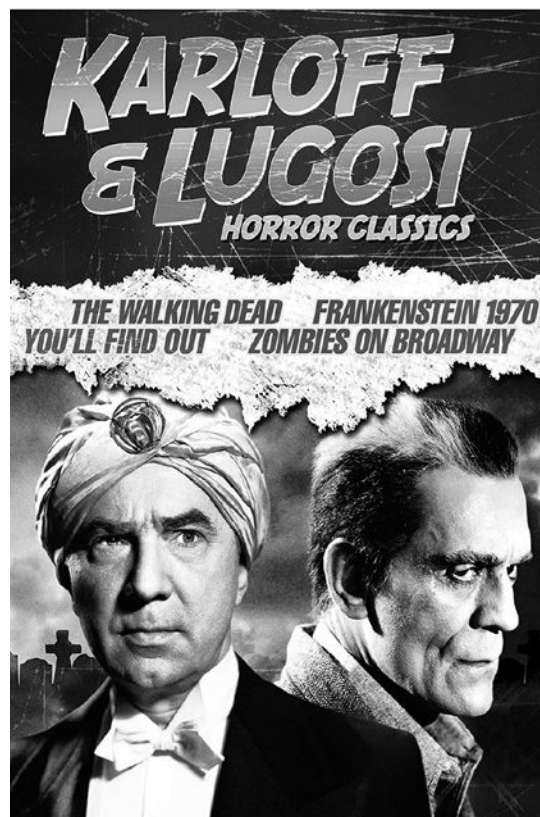
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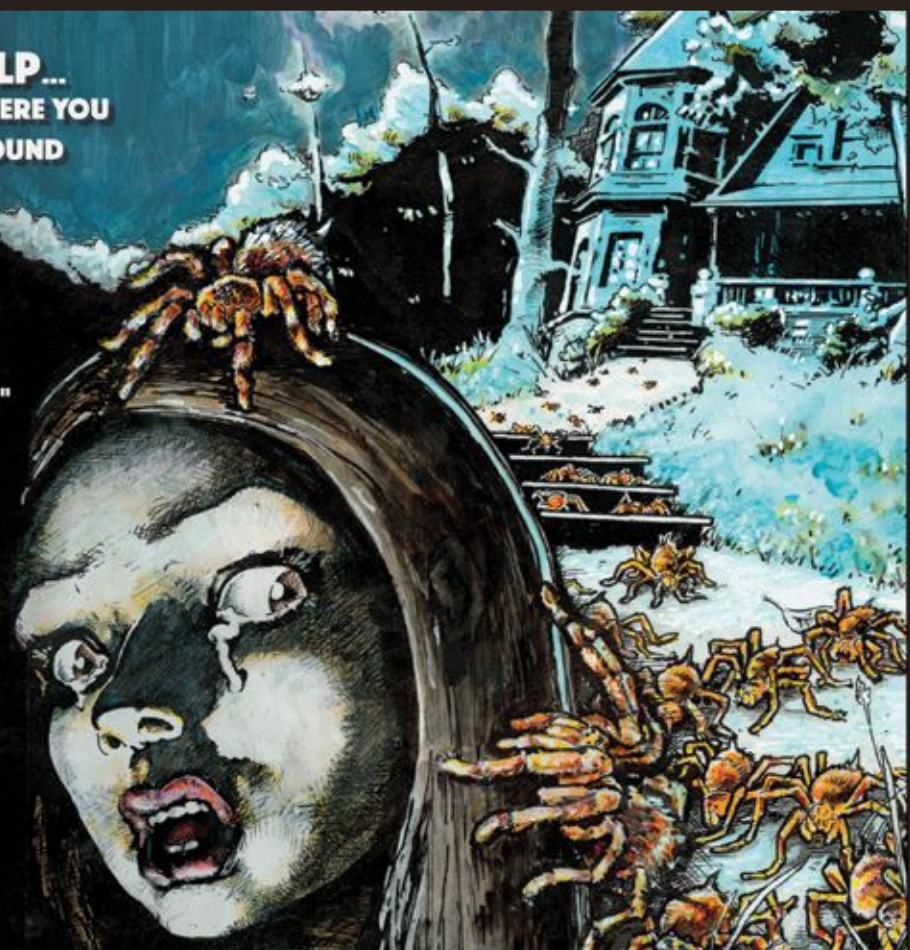


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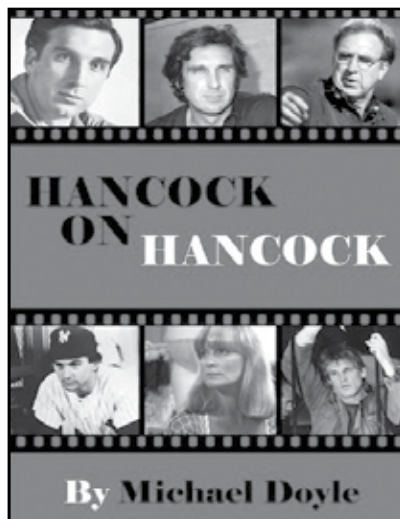
PHANTOM BOOKSHELF

BORN TO BE BAD: Talking to the Greatest Villains in Action Cinema By Timon Singh. Introduction by Steven E. De Souza. BearManor Media. Softcover. Photo Illustrated. 410 pages. \$29.95

Action-movie maven Timon Singh gets up close and personal with a variety of fave screen villains, including erstwhile **VideoScope** Character Kings William Atherton, Ronny Cox, and Martin Kove, in this info-packed tome. Singh's interviews cover several main categories—The Heavies, The Outsiders, The Final Boss—while also devoting sections to two villain-infested individual films, **Die Hard** and **Superman II**. Singh casts a wide thespian net here, spanning the spectrum from high-profile actors like David (Straw Dogs) Warner and Andrew (Dirty Harry) Robinson to such rarely heard voices as Matthias Hues and Al Leong, resulting in an invaluable work for genre buffs.

HANCOCK ON HANCOCK By Michael Doyle. BearManor Media. Softcover. Photo Illustrated. 776 pages. \$39.95

While versatile indie auteur John Hancock isn't primarily known as a genre director, he's responsible for crafting two enduring



cult thrillers, 1971's trippy **Let's Scare Jessica to Death** and 2001's harrowing **Suspended Animation** (aka **Mayhem**). Author Doyle, late of the excellent **Larry Cohen: The Stuff of Gods and Monsters** (BearManor Media), scores the inside scoop re the making of both chillers, as well as the 1973 baseball classic **Bang the Drum Slowly**, an early showcase for young actors Robert De Niro and Michael Moriarty. At a generous 776 pages, Doyle and his insightful subject don't stint on the details. Hancock, who frequently works with his writer spouse Dorothy Tristan, provides many an inspirational anecdote about overcoming obstacles to get quality films on screen. Withal, a worthy companion to **Larry Cohen** and an instructive read in its own right. ⚡

End Credits Contributing Writers

- ⚡ **Dan Cziraky** is using his sonic screwdriver to repair his backyard TARDIS.
- ⚡ The dynamic dad-daughter duo of **Terry & Tiffany DuFoe** operate the award-winning Internet radio station **Cult Radio A-Go-Go!**
- ⚡ **Ronald Charles Epstein's** book reviews are quoted on Amazon.ca.
- ⚡ **Tim Ferrante** is still scouring abandoned bijous in search of hidden treasures.
- ⚡ **Robert Freese** is planning an imminent return to the Cosmic Drive-In.
- ⚡ Scope out **Joe Kane's** new tome **Found Footage: How the Astro-Zombies Saved My Life and Other Tales of Movie Madness** (CultMachine), available from amazon.com.
- ⚡ **Nancy Naglin's** latest book, **The Salvation Army Tales**, is available from amazon.com.
- ⚡ **Joseph Perry** covers the international film festival front.
- ⚡ **John Seal** is burrowing ever deeper into the VHS basement.
- ⚡ **Bill Timoney** plays corrupt Warden Gifford in a flashback scene on episode 3 of the new season of **Orange Is the New Black**.
- ⚡ **Don Vaughan** is the author of **Reel Tears: The Beverly Washburn Story** (BearManor Media).
- ⚡ **Scott Voisin's Character Kings 2** is available from BearManor Media.

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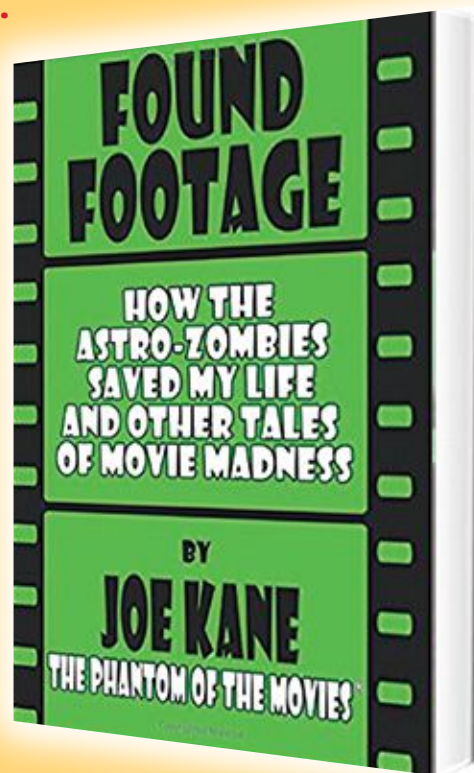
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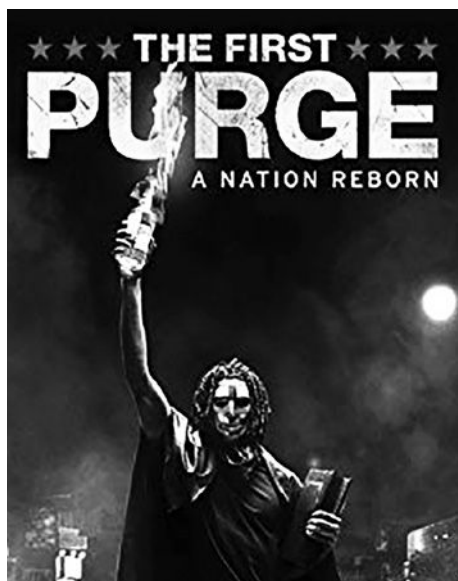
PHANTOM PHLASHES!

HORROR HORIZON: Several recent theatrical fear films make their way to Blu-ray in time for the fall fright season. Universal Studios returns to a popular franchise's roots with the origin story **The First Purge**, featuring Marisa Tomei, and explores the scary side of enhanced powers in Leigh (Saw) Whannell's **Upgrade**, starring Logan-Marshall Green and Bradley Cooper. Toni Collette and Gabriel Byrne topline in Ari Aster's **Hereditary** (Lionsgate), while an unCaged Nicolas leaves restraint in the rear-view with his over-the-top turn in the fiery revenge horror thriller **Mandy** (RLJ Entertainment), Scout-Taylor Compton joins genre vets Bill Moseley and Sid Haig for the fright-film send-up **Cynthia** (Indican Pictures), and Stanley Tucci looks to thwart infected creatures in **Patient Zero** (Sony Pictures). Cinedigm releases a trio of Halloween-targeted horrors—**Blood Fest**, the animated **Monster Family**, and **Strange Nature**, starring Tiffany Shepis—while Wild Eye Releasing issues the werewolf shocker **Bonehill Road** and the offbeat chiller **Forest of the Lost Souls**, and Shout! Factory furnishes **Feral** and **Devil's Doorway**. Elsewhere, Well Go USA welcomes Jason Goldberg's **Afraid**, Gravitas Ventures contributes **Along Came the Devil**, Monarch Entertainment offers **3rd Night**, and MPI Media digs deep into **The Witch Files**.

ACTION UPDATE: Universal Studios dominates the action arena with Dwayne Johnson and Neve Campbell in the CGI-driven disaster film **Skyscraper**, along with a pair of sequels, the latest entry in a venerable Roger Corman-created series, **Death Race: Beyond Anarchy**, featuring Zach McGowan and Danny Trejo, and **Scorpion King: Book of Souls**. Also new are the darkly comic **Ari-zona**, starring Danny McBride, Rosemarie Dewitt and Luke Wilson (RLJ Entertainment), and Trevor Jackson in Director X's **Superfly** reboot (Sony Pictures).

KILLER THRILLERS: Veteran casts headline a duo of fresh thrillers, with Jodie Foster and Jeff Goldblum joining Dave Bautista in the futuristic caper **Hotel Artemis** (Global Road Entertainment) and James Earl Jones, Bruce Dern, David Spade and Frank Whaley appearing in **Warning Shot** (Echo Bridge). Also due are the Asian cops-and-cartels thriller **Believer** (Well Go USA) and the high-concept **Painless** (Indican Pictures).

SHOCK YOKS: PacWest filmmaker William Stancik follows his psycho send-up **Jeremiah's Woods** with **Strippers and Blow** (Laslo Films), a mockumentary detailing a politically incorrect '80s comic's (Joe Zumba) attempted comeback in a more hostile contemporary climate. ✂



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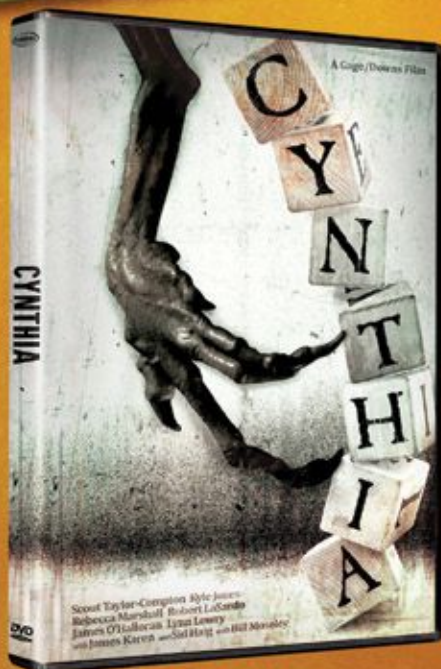


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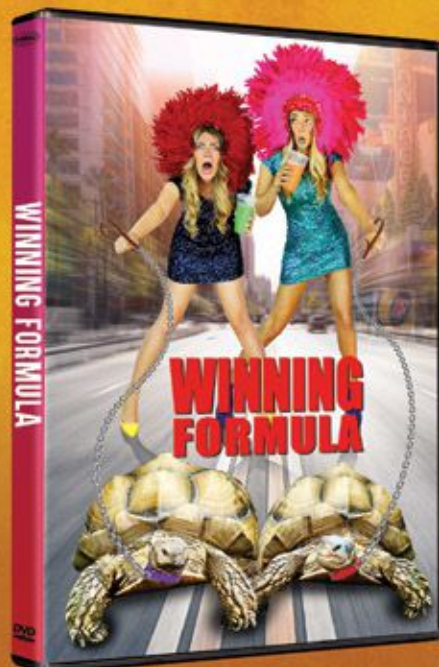
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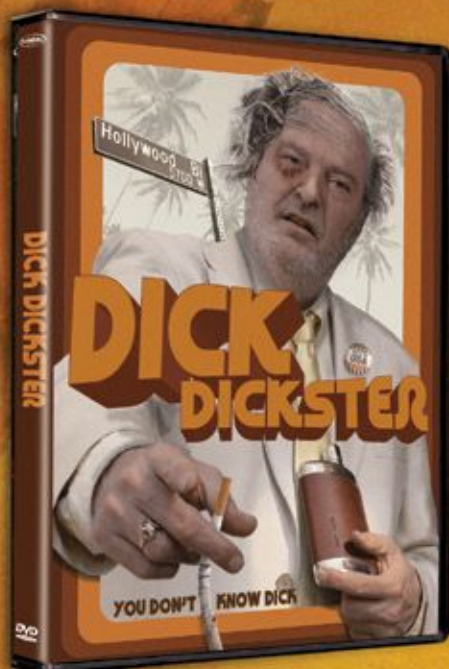
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